



# Off to a flying start

An early years guide to settling in

# Introduction

A good settling in process enables children and parents to be confident, relaxed and feel secure. Children will not be able to play and learn if they are stressed and their unhappiness will spread around the room affecting other children and practitioners. Spending time and care on the settling in process is worth its weight in gold and will pay dividends as children flourish in your care.

This booklet has been designed to help you consider different aspects of the settling in process and provide advice and ideas so that children have a positive start to your setting. We are aware that during the ongoing pandemic adaptations to your settling in process will need to be made, to ensure that you work within government guidelines to keep everyone safe. These adaptations are written in pink.

Throughout this booklet the term 'parents' has been used which includes legal guardians and carers.

## Why is a good settling in process important?

Starting at a new place is stressful. You may remember your feelings when you first started college or a new job. There may have been excitement but there also would have been stress and anxiety. Will I like the people? Will I get lost? Will I be able to find the toilets? What happens at lunch time? Who will I go to if I have a question? I am going to miss my old work friends...even though as adults we are better equipped to cope and manage our anxieties and stress – we still need other adults to support us and help us feel calm and safe.

Babies are not able to regulate their stress and need caring adults to co-regulate with them and help them feel safe. Through this co-regulation babies and children's brains develop and they gradually learn how to regulate their feelings. Under three's need adults around them to help them regulate their feelings and stress. Older children are on the path towards self-regulation but still have immature nervous systems and will need mindful soothing from a calm adult to support returning to a state of calm themselves.

Stress has a negative impact on brain development, so it is important that, throughout the children's time at your setting, adults are helping children to self-regulate their feelings. However, this is even more crucial during the settling in phase.

Many of you have been involved in the Five to Thrive programme promoted by Wiltshire Council and are Five to Thrive champions. The first three building blocks of Five to Thrive are important to establish when settling children into your setting so they are ready to go on to learn (play and talk).

**During the pandemic, children and parents will have had different experiences which may have an impact on how they feel during the settling in process. Children may be experiencing more stress and may be clingier to parents. These children will need even more consideration given to supporting them through the Five to Thrive model.**



"Five to Thrive" is a model for how connected relationships build brains.

Children need adults to notice and respond to them by soothing or stimulating.

# Five to Thrive – a model for promoting secure attachment:

Five to Thrive describes a sequence of parental activities found within attuned interactions with babies and children. Five to Thrive can happen in a blink of an eye, yet every part of the sequence is vital to enable the connection between parents/adults and children that build healthy brains. Five to Thrive can help practitioners to focus on the bond between themselves and the babies / children they care for – and help understand where they may need to focus their efforts. In addition, it can help practitioners to think about parental capacity in new ways – particularly with vulnerable families.

**Respond** - Responding and assessing needs (mindful awareness)

Babies and young children need adults who are physically and emotionally available to them, to notice and tune into their verbal and non-verbal communications. They need adults who 'hold them in their minds' and ask the question "What are you trying to tell me?". Adults will then be able to respond in the most appropriate way. When the adult stops what they are doing and turns their attention to the baby or child (RESPOND), patterns begin to develop in the baby's brain for feeling safe and belonging.

**Cuddle (Engage)** - Connecting and engaging (mindful co-regulation)

Close proximity to an adult is necessary for the nervous system of the child to match that of the adult. When an adult calms a child through physical contact or closeness, the adult's body starts to relax - the heart beat and breathing slows down. The child's body tunes in to this and starts to imitate so the child's heart rate and breathing slow down too.

This can be achieved through physical contact such as cuddles, hugs, rocking, holding hands, stroking or patting. However, for some children touch can be overwhelming – so alternative engagement other than touch is needed such as standing or sitting close, being side by side or walking together – but being close enough to give a sense of safety and the availability of a calm adult. Through this close proximity (CUDDLE / ENGAGE) with an adult a baby/child develops patterns in the brain for connecting with others and trusting others.

**Some parents and practitioners will need reassurance that it is ok for the keyperson to have physical contact with the children. It is important to explain why these young children need physical contact and how important it is for their mental well-being.**

**Relax** - self-regulating stress

When babies are born they are not able to self-regulate their own stress. Their brains learn to self-regulate through linking and connecting with the brain and nervous system of a regulated adult. Once the child has attuned to the adult by being physically close to them, then once the adult self-regulates (relaxes themselves) (RELAX). The child will mirror the adult's behaviour and relax too. Patterning for self-regulation develops in the brain.

Adults need to be aware of their own stress levels and use relaxation strategies, so they are in a position to be able to help children to relax and learn to self-regulate.

**Both parents and practitioners may be experiencing additional stress during the pandemic. Five to Thrive can be applied across the life course – and is a useful communication tool to support both colleagues and parents. Everyone needs some co-regulation from a calm adult from time to time. You can help by giving information and reassuring parents and practitioners. You may consider providing opportunities for them to talk to a trusted person and giving ideas on how to relax.**

**Play** – being playful: activating the right brain (mindful co-learning)

The right brain of the adult processes all the emotional activity that is going on – through facial expressions, tone of voice and other non-verbal signs – the adult shows the baby / child what is happening in that moment. This non-verbal communication (PLAY) activates the right side of the babies/child's brain – patterns develop in the brain for understanding and managing feelings.

**Talk** – creating a narrative: activating the left brain (mindful co-learning)

The left brain of the adult uses words to make sense of all the activity that is going on in that moment – through verbal activity such as explaining, describing, asking chatting, signing and singing. The adult also takes turns listening to the child (words, sounds) and replying to the child (words, sounds, tone of voice) – turn taking conversation ensures both brains are active. This verbal communication (TALK) activates the left brain of the child – building brain patterns for making sense of experience through the use of words and narrative.

## Keyperson

The Five to Thrive model supports the underpinning neuroscience that clearly indicates that babies and children need an adult to build a strong bond with in order to promote healthy attachment, healthy brain development, and self-regulation. Some babies and children may require more Five to Thrive moments than others to support stress regulation and healthy brain development due to possibly experiencing toxic stress and attachment gaps in their home environment.

This is reflected in the Statutory Framework, where it is a requirement to allocate a key person to every child. It states that the keyperson role;

“Is to help ensure that every child's care is tailored to meet their individual needs, to help the child become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship for the child and build a relationship with their parents.”

To be able to do this effectively the keyperson must be allocated to the child and family before the first visits. The keyperson must be available on all the visits and be there for all or most of the initial settling in phase. Allocating a buddy keyperson is recommended so that when the keyperson is on leave or on a lunch break the child has another adult they have built a bond with.

## Gathering Information about the children and families

You will need a range of information about the children and families during the settling in process. Some information you will collect before any visits that will form part of your registration form. This is the basic information as required in the EYFS Statutory Framework as well as any dietary requirements and medical information. Other information you will collect through conversations with parents during the settling in visits. This is usually captured in 'All about me' forms. Often this is personal information about the child such as likes, dislikes and how they like to be comforted.

This should be completed by the key person and parents having a discussion together. This will help the keyperson to build relationships with the family and to help parents feel valued

and that their child is the centre of your attention. You will find out so much more about the child by doing this collaboratively, compared to asking the parents to complete the form at home. You can also ask follow up questions to find out about something in a little more depth. By talking together you are supporting parents who speak English as an additional language or struggle with literacy skills to share information about their children.

Consider the timings for completing paperwork. Spreading out the paperwork over different sessions will help stop parents feeling overwhelmed. Maybe the manager can focus on the registration paperwork leaving the key person to focus on 'All About Me' information.

**During the pandemic you will have limited opportunities to gather information face to face. Some parents may be happy to complete registration forms electronically and email them back to you. Planned phone or skype calls could be used for the key person and parents to discuss and complete the 'All about me' forms.**

Information gathered from paperwork and discussions with parents can be used to create an individualised settling in plan. This can be completed with parents so there is a shared understanding of how their child will be supported by the key person during the settling in process. In the appendix there is a blank and an annotated version of an individualised settling in plan using the Five to Thrive model.

## Sharing information with parents and children

Parents will access information about your setting from a range of sources including:

- Website
- Social media
- Other parents
- Prospectus
- Information leaflets
- Parents notice board

It is important that this information is up to date, and easily accessible for all parents. You will need to consider parents who speak English as an additional language and parents with limited literacy skills. For example, you may need to talk through and explain written information.

**We have all seen the explosion of digital technology during the pandemic and we are all more comfortable with using it. Creating a virtual tour of your setting is a great opportunity to explain how and why you do things. Video clips and photos can easily be uploaded to your website for parents and children to look at as often as they like. Consider updating your website so it includes more information for parents and children.**

Photo booklets are a great way to help children become familiar with their keyperson and the indoor and outdoor environments. It is important that children are shown what the toilets look like, where they will hang their coats, where they will eat a snack/lunch and a range of favourite activities. It is also helpful to include photos of the main routines of the day such as saying goodbye to parents, story and song time and greeting parents at the end of the day. Children can look at these as often as they like and share them with other family members and friends.

**These are more important for children during the pandemic when they will have limited opportunities for settling in visits. These can be posted out, emailed or made available to download from the website.**

# Home visits

Home visits are a great way to meet informally and build a strong bond with parents and children. Parents and children feel relaxed in their familiar environment and parents may be more willing to share information in confidence if they wish. Some parents may not feel comfortable with home visits and this needs to be respected.

## Top Tips

- Clipboards and long forms can be off putting.
- Be flexible about timings of visits so they can be work around family commitments.
- Make sure parents know how long the visit will be.
- Arrive on time!
- Bring resources, may be a story sack to play with the children
- Go in pairs for safeguarding reasons
- Create a policy and risk assessment for home visits.

During the pandemic you will need to discuss beforehand how you are going to keep everyone safe during a home visit. For example, you may explain that you will not be social distancing with the children because it is important that you build a bond. However, maybe you will try and play alongside rather than face to face.

# Settling in visits

These are important because they:

- Help children build a relationship with their key person and become familiar with the environment and routines whilst they have the security of their parents with them.
- Help parents to build positive relationships with their key person and feel confident and relaxed that their child will be happy.
- Provide an opportunity to model how to play and interact with children in an informal way. This will help parents to support home learning more effectively.
- Help parents become familiar with typical behaviours of children of a similar age. This will foster realistic expectations and help alleviate worries parents may have.
- Provide opportunities for informal discussions with parents about their child as they play. This could include, weaving into the conversation, how parents can also be involved in supporting their child's learning and development.
- Ensure that the parents and child are introduced to and spend some time with the buddy key person.

## Top Tips

- Have clear expectations for parents to stay for a minimum number of visits. We recommend a minimum of three visits to ensure children are happy to play away from parents. A flexible approach is needed to allow for additional visits to meet individual needs. It may be helpful to include in your admissions policy the minimum number of settling in visits required.

- If parents are reluctant to have at least three settling in sessions, talk to them and try and find out the reasons for this. Then together you can reassure and adapt the process. Maybe another close family member can do the visits.
- Use Penny Tassoni's five step approach to help children to gradually become comfortable to be with the key person and for the parents to be out of sight. Here is a link for further details about this approach. [www.pacey.org.uk/parents/working-with-your-childcarer/helping-your-child-settle-in/](http://www.pacey.org.uk/parents/working-with-your-childcarer/helping-your-child-settle-in/)
- Share and talk about the settling in visits with parents beforehand so they are clear about the process and their role during the visits.
- Settling in visits should be in the weeks leading up to children starting, which may mean at the start of term not before the holidays.
- Start with shorter visits that take place during child-initiated play. During subsequent visits introduce children to snack time and maybe story or song time if appropriate for the age. It may be worth considering including a lunch session if this takes place in a different room.
- Consider booking quieter days and/or have extra staff for first visits.
- Make sure all practitioners know the names and correct pronunciation of the child's and parent's names before the visits.
- Have clear expectations for the key person. He/she should be spending time with the child and encouraging parents to gradually take a back seat.
- Once children are attending without their parents, it is important to keep in touch to reassure parents. This can be through phone calls, texts, video links or photos.
- Discuss and agree an individual settling in plan to support both parents and child. This may need to be adapted during the settling in process to ensure the child has a good bond with their key person before he/she is left for the first time.

Settling in visits will have to be different during the COVID 19 pandemic. Possible ideas are:

- Visits in the setting outdoor area either after session or when no other children are present.
- Visits in the indoor room after the other children have gone home.
- Visits at the end of August/early September before you are open fully so parents and children can explore and play in the room.
- Home visits
- Skype/Zoom or video of the keyperson singing favourite nursery rhymes

Blowing bubbles is usually a great activity for younger children, however, unless these are blown by a machine this would not be an appropriate activity during the pandemic.

During the pandemic children will have had limited opportunities to be left with other adults. Encourage parents to help their children get used to being with other familiar adults without their parents being there. For example, not being in the same room, popping out into the garden or shops and gradually extending the time they are absent.

Parents are likely to be more anxious than normal and so they will need extra reassurance. Children will pick up on non-verbal cues from their parents and will follow their parents lead. So, if parents are confident and relaxed, they will give their children a 'green light' that it is Ok to 'make friends' with us.

# Greeting and saying goodbye

Some parents are keen to 'disappear' without saying goodbye to their children and others are reluctant to leave and will prolong the process. Neither support the emotional well-being of child or parents. Parents should be encouraged to say goodbye in a calm and brief manner and tell their child when they will be back. The keyperson should discuss and agree with the parents a consistent goodbye routine that will work best for them and their children. It is important that practitioners confidently model this when they greet and say goodbye to parents and children.

**During the pandemic when parents are not allowed into the room to settle their children, having a secure consistent goodbye routine is going to be even more important. Consider having a place outside where the keyperson can greet and spend time with the child and parent. Possibly have a 'waving window' where both children and parents wave to each other.**

## Comforters

Babies and young children often need a comforter, dummy or a special thing from home to help them settle in. These need to be available for children as they are settling in. Provide a special place where these can be kept that can be easily accessed by the children. They are more likely to give them up and become engrossed in play if they know they can go and get their comforter whenever they need them.

**With the strict hygiene measures put in place during the pandemic it would be easy to ban all these comforters. However, children's emotional well-being is paramount. It is unlikely that children will drop their comforter or allow other children to handle it and as soon as children become engrossed in play the key person can suggest it is put in its safe place.**

## Settling in considerations for infants under two years

Remember that good transitions start with building strong and trusting relationships with parents. When a parent is in a happy and in a relaxed state, then this positive emotional state is transmitted to their baby which is the beginning of the baby being able to self-regulate their emotions in the outside world, as described through the Five to Thrive model.

For babies, what is vital to their holistic development is the continuation of warm and loving care-giving behaviours from the people around them. The environment and toys are not nearly as important to very young children and therefore can be considered in more detail once the baby is settled with their key person.

It is important to remember that the ability to recall people and events are still in the early developmental stages in the baby brain. Babies of around nine months of age are just beginning to recall events that happened a week ago. This means a baby is likely to find it stressful and upsetting being left in your setting in the care of unfamiliar adults in the early days.

It is also essential to remember that in these early days, the relationship with their key person is still being established which takes time. How much time will differ and depend on

age and stage of baby as well as individual characteristics such as temperament and family circumstances.

However, there is a lot you can do to help them to quickly develop their memorability of you and begin to develop a strong bond with their key person.

- Set time aside to establish a trusting bond with the family – what does this look like in your setting? Home visits are preferable but consider new technology such as Facetime or Zoom for virtual meetings if this is not possible.
- Increase frequency of visits/virtual visits leading up to the baby starting in the setting as this will promote familiarity with their key person first and will make it easier for the baby to settle in unfamiliar surroundings.
- Flexible settling in sessions that are tailored to meet the needs of each baby and family joining your setting. A rushed settling in procedure may have a damaging emotional effect on the baby and family concerned.
- Ensure, as far as is practical, that key person/key person buddy carries out all care-giving routines to continue to bond with infant and help them to feel safe and secure.
- Ensure key person is consistently in setting to welcome baby and family in the early days and can spend lots of time playing with the baby and getting to know them to build a bond and gain the infants' trust.
- Encourage parents to book their baby in for at least two sessions per week to begin with, as this will speed up the memorability process and help the baby to settle in more easily.
- Provide an information booklet containing; a basic daily routine, photographs of regular room staff (inc. key person/buddy key person assigned to baby), setting entrance, baby room environment, nappy-changing area, sleep room, outside area.
- Loan a play sack to each new family to explore at home - to help familiarise baby with setting toys and equipment. Have the same play sack available in setting to explore when baby starts as contents will already be familiar to them.
- Complete an 'All about me sheet'/'One page profile' with parents to gather detailed information about baby's daily routine which can be replicated in the setting for continuity of care-giving such as: breast/formula milk, personal feeding equipment, weening foods being introduced (if over 6mths old), sleep routine, health/medical information, baby's favourite toy/song/story, likes and dislikes, what upsets baby, what soothes and comforts baby.
- Create laminated family photographs/family pets on a keyring for baby to hold/attach to clothing.
- Create wall display of family tree at baby's eye level height (e.g. mobile or non-mobile eye-level).
- Create a 'special box' - containing familiar items from home that currently interests baby. Familiar items from home may help to comfort and distract a baby when they become distressed.
- Provide personal space to store coat, bag, outdoors shoes etc and include room for anything they've made to take home.
- In between sessions – consider setting up 'virtual 'keeping in touch' meetings' to help key person/buddy build up baby's happy memories of you and the setting. You could share a favourite story/song that baby enjoys at home and in setting. These sessions needn't last long but could make a huge difference to strength of the emotional connection between you, the baby and their parents/carers.

- Remember that crying is a powerful means of communicating in non-verbal and verbal babies. It triggers a stress response in both adults and other children around them. It is a 'call to action' for the adults present!
- If baby becomes difficult to comfort – consider changing the environment for a while. Take them outside in the garden or go for a walk. Being outdoors in the fresh air can help to calm children down and distract them with environmental sights and sounds. This strategy will also enable other babies and adults inside to return to a more relaxed emotional state.
- Remember the Five to Thrive model. When babies and children become distressed, no cognitive learning is taking place!  
Respond; Cuddle; Relax; Play; Talk

## Minimising parental anxiety in the early days

- When parent collects their baby, reassure them by highlighting positives first. If baby became upset, you will need to mention this and talk about how you were able to calm their baby down. It is reassuring for parents to hear that you can comfort their baby if they become upset when they are not there.
- When leaving their baby in the early days, encourage parents to wave, smile and say goodbye positively – even if they don't feel this way – to signal to their infant that it 'all is well and that is 'ok' to leave them here with you'.
- Establish and record apart from parents, any other adult who will be collecting baby from setting (e.g. grandparents).
- Provide photographs of baby being cared for in the setting. Parents will enjoy seeing for themselves how contented their baby is being nurtured by kind and attentive staff.
- If you use an online learning journal system, make time to load videos and images regularly onto the parent portal so parents can access frequently and enjoy sharing positive nursery moments at home with baby and other family members.
- Consider having a room camera that may be activated at agreed times so that parents can log in to see their baby being cared for in the setting.
- Consider setting up PowerPoint slideshow on a continuous loop or installing a Digital photo frame showing typical baby room daily routine as experienced by babies including mealtimes, naptimes, playing and exploring time, going out for a walk etc...

**Remember happy parents = happy baby**

## Settling in considerations for two-three year olds

Typical two-year olds have a strong need to be physically close to their parents. Evolutionally, this has developed to keep exploring toddlers close to familiar adults to keep them safe. This does make it harder for two-year olds, compared to three- and four-year olds, to leave their parents. However, a good settling in process will enable two-year olds to settle successfully.

Building a strong bond with the key person is going to be key so he/she can become a familiar adult that the two-year-old trusts and feels comfortable with. The five-step approach outlined by Penny Tassoni, as mentioned above, will really help with this.

Helpful hints when meeting two -year olds for the first time:

- Avoid prolonged eye contact as this can be seen to be threatening. Try to gaze and then look away.
- Allow two -year olds space when playing or showing something. This will again prevent them feeling threatened and allow them to approach you when they feel ready.
- Two-year olds love adults who are playful. Try using puppets or pretending that you can't see a toy that is hiding.
- Make comments or talk to yourself rather than ask questions. For example, "I wonder where Meg the cat has gone, Is she behind the book? No, is she under the blanket? At this point two-year olds won't be able to resist pointing or saying she is in the box!"
- Play alongside two-year olds, copying their actions. This tells them that you like and value what they are doing in a non-threatening way.

As two-year olds feel more comfortable with you, gradually build up physical contact with them. This is important because two-year olds will need physical comfort and reassurance from you when their parents are not present. Start by offering a toy that the child takes from your hand. Offer a hand when moving across the room or snuggle up with a book. By the end of the last settling in visit the child should feel comfortable with holding your hand or having a hug from you.

Throughout the settling in visits and in the first days without parents, two-year olds will need you to tune into them, so you can respond appropriately to them. Two-year olds often have limited verbal language so may find it difficult to express their feelings, wants and needs. They will need you to listen and observe their body language, facial expressions and gestures carefully, so you can understand what their behaviour is telling you.

## Settling in considerations for pre-school aged children

The ideas for two-year olds encompass good practice for most little children and are not exclusive to that age group but more about each child's individual developmental level. Some of our three and four-year olds may have had previous experience of leaving their main carers through staying with extended family member or childminders. They may be confident and happy to separate almost immediately while others will be extremely cautious and tentative in their approach. A one size fits all policy cannot be implemented, each child deserves a tailored experience for their settling in process to be positive and effective. A little more time and care at the start can result in children being happy and ready to learn throughout their preschool experience.

Children need the opportunity to build strong attachments to their keyperson, their peers and their surroundings before they can operate as powerful risk-taking learners. Here are a few tips to consider when children come to preschool or nursery for the first time.

- Make settling in visits short and sweet, if children go home on a high they will be more likely to feel excited about coming back.
- Encourage carers to show children around the area, then base themselves in one spot, this should encourage children to explore independently.
- Allow children to bring special and familiar objects from home to help with the transition; while dragging a blankie around can inhibit children's ability to get involved it can provide a comforting bridge between home and the setting at the start.

- No child should ever be dragged from their parents screaming, and while parents may have work commitments they need to be made aware that the settling in process is not an immediate childcare fix but may need their time and attention.
- Parents can leave for short bursts to start with maybe to buy a child a favourite cake or magazine or to carry out a simple errand that the child is familiar with such as fetching milk or putting petrol in the car. Offer children plenty of proximity to their key person at this time and verbal reassurance. Use this opportunity to talk about where parents have gone and explain that they will be back. Use a clock face to show children how many minutes there will be and never let parents sneak off without saying goodbye.
- Make life easy for the child and their keyperson by understanding their needs; can they use the bathroom independently, do they have dietary requirements or special educational needs, make sure you have all the information you need to make the child as comfortable as possible before they are left in your care.
- Sensory play is an important part of the curriculum throughout the early years but vital during these early days. Children need the opportunity to lose themselves in sand, water, paint, dough and mud. This maybe one of the first opportunities they have had to fully immerse themselves in exploratory and sensory experiences and this can have a positive and amazing impact on children's ability to remain engaged and happy. If children can lose themselves in their play those first steps into the unknown will become enjoyable and far more bearable.
- Finally, it's the small details that make all the difference, remembering family details and special occasions for a conversation around a child's specific experiences can help build pathways to trust. Using special gestures or words that children are used too at home can help a child feel seen and understood.

## Settling in considerations for children with SEND

The ideas described above encompass good practice for most little children, including those with a special educational need and/or disability (SEND). However, where a child with SEND is transitioning into an early years setting, additional planning and preparation will be necessary before the child starts to ensure a smooth and successful settling in process.

- Gather as much information as possible about the child. Using formats such as an All About Me booklet, One-Page Profiles, Individual Education Plans (IEP) and My Support Plans (MSP), identify what is working well and what is not working well for the child. What are their dislikes and likes? How best do they communicate? A holistic understanding of their learning and development is imperative to support a successful settling in process
- Identify all professionals involved with the child and arrange a Transition Inclusion Support Meeting (TISM). These professionals may include a speech and language therapist, a health visitor, a community paediatrician, Portage, a district specialist centre etc. Arranging a TISM with these professionals and parents will further support gaining a holistic understanding of the child's learning and development. It will allow for more information to be shared so that the child's needs can be best met when they transition into the early years setting

**During the current climate, it may not be possible to arrange a face to face meeting with all professionals. Make use of Microsoft Teams and Zoom where possible to ensure these information sharing meetings can take place**

- Identify if any additional training is needed prior to the child transitioning into the setting.

Does the child use a different and preferred form of communication? Do practitioners need training for Makaton or PECS? Does the child have a medical need? If so, does a risk assessment and a health care plan need to be completed by a medical practitioner? Does the child require medical treatment whilst in the setting? If so, do practitioners need additional medical training beyond a paediatric first aid certificate? If information sharing is effective in the first instance, these training needs should be easily identified

- Develop positive relationships between the child, their family, the key person and the setting's SENDCo ahead of the child transitioning into the setting. Identify a practitioner that can best meet the needs of the child to be their key person and provide them with the opportunities to develop a positive relationship with the child and their family ahead of the child starting at the setting. Although the setting's SENDCo may not be working directly with the child, they will be responsible for ensuring a graduated approach to SEND support is implemented and will be responsible for overseeing the 'assess, plan, do, review' cycle, so it is imperative that they also can develop a positive relationship with the child and family.
- Adapt your environment and your resources where appropriate. Having gained a holistic understanding of the child's needs, look at your setting and your resources. Is your environment suitable to meet their needs? Do you need any specialist equipment such as a hand rail in the toilet or a ramp into the garden? Are the toys and activities available developmentally appropriate for the child? Do you need to create a safe space or a calm down zone? Preparing the environment ahead of the child starting will support a smooth and successful settling in process
- When necessary, ask the parents to complete a sensory checklist. We know that children use their senses and sensory play to learn and develop. However, for some children with SEND, some of their senses can be heightened and being exposed to some sensory activities can become overwhelming for them. In contrast, some children with SEND need to seek sensory feedback and this may need to be managed in a safe way. By asking the parents to complete a sensory checklist, this can help identify which types of sensory play will support their child's learning and development and which types of sensory play they may find sensitive
- Be aware that behaviour you may deem challenging, negative or unacceptable is a form of communication. ALL behaviour has a reason. For some children with SEND, they will attempt to communicate their needs in a range of ways, including the use of physical reactions towards other children and practitioners. It is imperative that all practitioners understand that the child is trying to express themselves and support is needed to help them find a different way to communicate. Ensure the environment offers a total communication approach (such as visual aids, objects of reference, Makaton etc.) to support the child in finding positive ways to communicate their needs
- Agree a settling in process with the parents. Once you have gained a holistic understanding of the child's needs and have everything in place to ensure their needs are met, plan a settling in process with the parents. Although you may have a settling in policy, it needs to be remembered that it's not a 'one size fits all' policy and this will need to be tweaked for children with SEND. What is best for that individual child? Would they benefit from shorter sessions over a longer period of time? Would they benefit from a parent staying for longer than normal? Would they benefit from two shorter sessions rather than one longer day? The settling in process does not need to be set in stone, and it can be amended as the child starts to meet their needs

Top tips once a settling in process has been planned

- Offer a home visit with the key person and SENDCo. Home visits are a great way to meet informally and build a strong bond with parents and children. Parents and children feel relaxed in their familiar environment and parents may be more willing to share information

in confidence if they wish. Some parents may not feel comfortable with home visits and this needs to be respected.

- Create a photo book. Many children with SEND rely in visual clues to help them make sense of their environment. Visual aids such as a photo book can help prepare them for the transition into the setting. Pictures of their key person, the outside environment, the inside environment, the toilets, the cloakroom, differing activities that will be available to them are all good examples of the photos you can put into the book. Allowing the child access to this book ahead of their settling in process will give them opportunities to explore it at home with familiar people.
- Be aware of parental anxieties. It can be a time of anxiety for any parent leaving their child at an early years setting, but for a parent of a child with SEND, they will have additional worries regarding their child's needs being met. Be empathetic to their worries and try to reassure them that their child will be well looked after.
- Ensure the child's key worker has an abundance of opportunities to develop a positive relationship with the child during the settling in process. We know that children need that strong relationship and bond to become comfortable in exploring their environment and to become risk takers
- Ensure consistency and continuity from all practitioners. Although the key person will know the child well, it is imperative that all practitioners in the room have a good awareness of the child's individual needs. Strategies and interventions that have been agreed during the information sharing process needs to be implemented by all practitioners working with the child. If using a total communication approach, all practitioners need to be implementing this. If using transition warnings, all practitioners need to ensure this happens etc.
- Seek advice and support from your Early Years Inclusion Officer (EYIO). Your EYIO is available to support with all the steps needed to ensure a smooth and successful transition for children with SEND.

