



Supporting Parents & Carers



Top Tips

- ✓ Try to share information in as many ways as possible, taking into account parental need.
- ✓ Provide a welcome booklet including information about routines, photographs of staff members, the curriculum and the organisation.
- ✓ Hold informal meetings to share information about the child's new setting.
- ✓ Display a photo board of staff members.
- ✓ Offer families a key person as a point of contact.
- ✓ Make provision for one to one time between the key person and the family.
- ✓ Provide opportunities to welcome parents and carers into their child's environment.
- ✓ Encourage parents and carers to meet and support each other.
- ✓ Provide a worry box for parents and carers to share any anxieties.
- ✓ Offer support with links to other relevant professionals such as interpreters, health professionals and relevant education services.

This section of the pack has been written to support you with considering the needs of parents and carers during times of transition.

A great deal of research supports the view that we can only do our best for the children in our care if we involve their parents and families. It's important to listen to what parents can tell you about their children and accept that as their child's first educator, they have a wealth of knowledge.

Sending a child to a new setting or class can be scary for parents and carers too! It's vital that we make our settings welcoming and less threatening to new parents and carers, so that they can, in turn, give positive messages to their children.

Parent's views are central to the transition process. It's essential that settings and schools continually review their transition arrangements, encourage open dialogue with parents, and listen to their views.

This section provides practical ideas and suggestions for you to help support parents and carers, so that they can help to prepare their child to move from one stage of their learning journey to the next.

“The experience of transitions can be strengthened through consultation with parents incorporating their views in changes to practice... Perhaps the continued involvement and commitment of parents is the most important evidence of successful transitions.”

Successful Transitions – Listening to Parents, Bristol City Council

Sharing information



A home visit can be beneficial

Sharing information with parents and carers is a key part of ensuring smooth transition. Remember that communication needs to be relevant and timely – and, of course, as clear as possible.

Keep it simple

Create a **simple leaflet** or **welcome booklet** which includes basic routine and timetable information, as well as contact names and numbers. Or develop an in-depth **induction pack** which includes details of staff, curriculum, and the part that parents have to play in their child's learning journey. Try to make sure the language you use is parent-friendly – don't use jargon or acronyms.

Host an **induction evening** where parents are given a balance of curriculum and routine information. Be brief, fun, exciting and interesting. Provide a handout or leaflet so that parents can refer back if they need to.

Make a list of **twenty things** new parents should know about your setting. These are your key messages – stick to them and reinforce them whenever you can.

Make **time to talk** to parents and carers – five minutes is all it takes!

Use a **communication book** to tell parents about their child's activity – or those 'Wow' moments. These can be really vital if you never see parents directly, and can help keep lines of communication open.

Use regular **parent meetings** to communicate. Arrange convenient times to meet individual families and explore their feelings and perceptions and address personal concerns. Allow time to get to know each family – they're all different.

Try developing a **regular newsletter** which summarises the upcoming topic and curriculum. Inform parents of any forthcoming events and suggest ways in which they can help their child to learn at home in the coming weeks.

Use a photo board of staff members so parents can identify adults that their child may talk about.

Be flexible to the individual needs of the child – and their family.

Some early guidance on reading and phonics may also be gratefully received.

“Children whose parents are most involved in their school life survive these transitions with no lasting damage.”

*Alison Shepherd, TES,
17th June 2005*

Emotional well being



Familiar faces help transition

Change can be a stressful time for parents and carers as well as children. They're thinking about juggling routines, meeting new staff, as well as remembering new kit!

Try to keep lines of communication as open and welcoming as possible during times of transition. Simple things can make a huge difference.

How do parents feel?

Have you ever asked parents how they feel? Do you really listen to their response?

It's really important that parents feel heard, and that they have a range of opportunities for communicating with you. What works for one may not work for another.

Getting to know parents will help you to build a relationship based on trust and respect. Make time for a proper induction meeting, and make it as relaxed as possible. Try to invite some current parents who may be able to support new parents.

Consider a **buddy system** for parents who may feel anxious and isolated.

Develop a **settling in plan** – particularly for very young, or children with Special Educational Needs. This might include some background on the child, such as activities that their child enjoys, and small step targets to help the child settle. Ideally, this will be reviewed regularly with the parents and built upon as the child becomes more confident.

Allow ample **one to one** time – offer your parents and carers an appointment to see you to talk without others being around. This may be at home or in the setting. Parents may offer more sensitive information about the child at this time and they will feel reassured by spending some time with you.

In practice

“We have a **worry box** in our pre-school to collect parent's concerns about their child starting school. We address those worries at our information evenings.

We always try to **encourage parents** to get to know each other, so that they can share concerns. We make time at information evenings for parents to network.

We have a **key person** - this works well for parents as well as the child. Parents need to talk, listen and learn from their key person.”

“He thinks that school is extra to pre-school. I don't think he knows that he won't come anymore...”

Parent

Working in partnership

Parents are your key partners. A successful partnership is built on strong communication and trust.

Firstly – **share knowledge** with your parents. Ask them about their child. Create a picture of their child together. Perhaps use a questionnaire to drive the responses.

Open doors to parents – let them stay longer in the mornings. Maybe have an allocated morning when parents can stay. Talk to them about their child, note what they say and use this information to plan the child's next steps.

Ask parents how **they** would prefer to keep in contact – phone? email? or through a communication book?

Consider allowing your parents and carers to contribute to their child's assessments. You may use parents evenings to collect their opinions or send out a questionnaire.

Try to plan opportunities for parents to meet practitioners regularly on a one to one basis throughout the year, including home visits if appropriate.



Take time to talk when parents drop off or pick up their children



New rooms, new routines

SEN

Consider the extra stress for parents and carers for children with Special Educational Needs.

- Be sensitive to the point of view of parents and carers who are presenting their child to the world at every transition.
- Parents and carers have often 'told their story' to many different professionals and agencies. Be aware that they may take it for granted that all agencies share information and so you are aware of their previous experiences.
- Ensure that parents and carers are confident that you have made contact with those who have been working closely with their child and family.
- Engage parents and carers by encouraging them to participate in the first or last part of the school day so that they too feel included.
- Ensure parents and carers are not isolated at the school gate either through lack of confidence or remarks made by other parents.
- Children who have identified needs before they start school may have benefited from effective Individual Education Plans, differentiated activities and the advice and support of outside agencies in their pre-school setting. Their parents will have been partners in those arrangements.
- Parents will have been invited to attend reviews of their child's progress, shared their knowledge of the child and been included in sharing strategies and activities to help their child develop to his or her full potential.



“A great deal of research supports the belief that we can only do our best for the children in our care if we involve their parents and families. We need to listen to what parents can tell us about their children and accept that as their child's first educator, they have a wealth of knowledge that we would do well to heed.”

Anne O'Connor, EYFS 2007

English as an Additional Language

- Time is crucial when supporting parents with settling their child to a new environment. Remember to allow extra time for those parents who have English as an Additional Language.
- You may find that their understanding of a language is better than their spoken, so do not be put off by trying to communicate with parents and carers.
- Tell parents about the friendships that their children are making.
- Encourage previous EAL parents to share experiences with new parents and translate information to parents or practitioners.
- Spend time finding out about the child's home background and experiences they have encountered before coming to your setting.
- Use home visits to share experiences so that you have a greater understanding of the families' background and cultural experiences.
- Take opportunities to talk to parents as they arise. But it can be useful when first getting to know a family to actually allocate some time to get to know them. Spend time talking to the parent/carer in a quieter environment so that parents can share information with you.
- Arrange social evenings and support parents and children to spend time getting to know you in a more informal way.
- Photographs are a great way of sharing experiences.
- Remember when you are allocating slots for parent evenings that you actually allow more time for Parents who have little English, because somebody may need to translate for you.
- When asking help for translation, remember to respect the parents wishes, they may not appreciate having a stranger or another parent translating information about their child.
- Although older siblings can be a useful resource to translate some information, you do need to take into account the child's understanding of what you are trying to convey.
- Gestures are a powerful form of communication and this needs taking into account when communicating with all parents and carers particularly if English is an additional language.
- Try making a video about the new setting that parents can borrow and watch at home.

“Children and parents need time and opportunities to familiarise themselves with the school environment and to start building relationships with key members of staff.”

*Successful Transitions
- Listening to parents,
Bristol City Council*



**Your
CD-ROM
contains useful
tools for you to
use in your setting.**



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