

Providing support to parents during and following transitions

Research evidence

Research tells us that parents/carers are very much affected by transitions which “can be quite demanding for the whole family” (O’Toole, Hayes and Mhathuna, 2013) as they experience change too – e.g. different timings, organisation, different expectations, different levels of involvement, different relationships with school staff, etc. :

“Discontinuities in the role and involvement of parents between preschool services and school are often a result of parent involvement at schools generally being more formalised than in preschool services. At school parents are less able to come and go as they please and generally have less input into the management and delivery of services. Parents often have different expectations for their child's learning and development.” (Margetts, 1999)

It is therefore important that parents are effectively included and viewed as equal partners (Kemp, 2003):

“Research has highlighted the importance of parental involvement for children’s successful transitions, as it is they who are usually the stable factor for the child at such potentially unstable times.” (O’Toole, Hayes and Mhathuna, 2013)

Effective communication between settings and parents is vital (Janus et al, 2007); it is equally important that this communication is not just about sharing information – open, warm, supportive dialogue is key (Kemp, 2003). The importance of the first interactions and the beginnings of forming relationships between family and school cannot be over-emphasised:

“Teachers nominated the attitude of the family as being by far the most important factor (*in successful transitions*) while parents nominated the attitude of the teachers as being the most important factor. This confirms the importance that has been attached to the working relationship between families and services ...” (Kemp, 2003)

Parents need more emotional support during transitions than we imagine - we need to actively foster warm, mutually supportive relationships with all parents/carers (Kemp, 2003). This should be happening before the child starts school so that there is that feeling of being eagerly awaited, listened to and understood (O’Connor, 2018).

“In particular, schools should be mindful of issues of ethos, and the changing atmospheres experienced by children and parents as they move through the educational system. The need for emotional as well as academic support at all levels must be recognised.” (O’Toole, Hayes and Mhathuna, 2013)

It is vital that this support continues throughout the child’s time in school – after transitions have taken place. Research tells us that lots of parents/carers report a decline in support and relationships as transitions end (Siddiqua and Janus, 2017).

References:

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