

2.4 Key Person

A key person has **special responsibilities** for working with a small number of children, giving them the reassurance to feel **safe** and cared for and building relationships with their parents.



Secure attachment

- A key person helps the baby or child to become familiar with the setting and to feel confident and safe within it.
- A key person develops a genuine bond with children and offers a settled, close relationship.
- When children feel happy and secure in this way they are confident to explore and to try out new things.
- Even when children are older and can hold special people in mind for longer there is still a need for them to have a key person to depend on in the setting, such as their teacher or a teaching assistant.

Shared care

- A key person meets the needs of each child in their care and responds sensitively to their feelings, ideas and behaviour.
- A key person talks to parents to make sure that the child is being cared for appropriately for each family.
- A close emotional relationship with a key person in the setting does not undermine children's ties with their own parents.
- Careful records of the child's development and progress are created and shared by parents, the child, the key person and other professionals as necessary.

Independence

- Babies and children become independent by being able to depend upon adults for reassurance and comfort.
- Children's independence is most obvious when they feel confident and self-assured, such as when they are in their own home with family, or with friends and familiar carers such as a key person.
- Babies and children are likely to be much less independent when they are in new situations, such as a new group or when they feel unwell or anxious.



Effective practice

- Ensure that rotas are based on when a key person is available for each child.
- Provide a second key person for children so that when the main key person is away there is a familiar and trusted person who knows the child well.
- Plan time for each key person to work with parents so that they really know and understand the children in their key group.
- As children move groups or settings, help them to become familiar with their new key person.



Challenges and dilemmas

- Reassuring others that children will not become too dependent on a key person or find it difficult to adjust to being a member of a group.
- Meeting children's needs for a key person while being concerned for staff who may feel over-attached to a child.
- Reassuring parents who may be concerned that children may be more attached to staff than to them.
- Supporting children's transitions within and beyond a setting, particularly as children reach four or five years of age.



Reflecting on practice

Imagine what your setting seems like to a parent and their child when they first arrive. It may seem busy, friendly, noisy, lively, exciting and fun to you.

- How might it seem to an anxious parent and their young child of 18 months who has just experienced a violent family break-up?
- How might it seem to a five-year-old who has been living in one room with a parent who is depressed and makes little conversation?

What do I do next?

- **Welfare requirements** are explained in full in the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* booklet.
- **Areas of Learning and Development** including effective practice, planning and resourcing at different stages are detailed in the *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage* booklet and on the CD-ROM.
- **Early Support** information is available on the CD-ROM under areas of Learning and Development.
- **Research and resources** are available on the CD-ROM.

