

# Transitions

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## transition

/trənˈzɪʃ(ə)n, trɑːn-, -ˈsɪʃ-/ 

*noun*

1. the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another.  
"students in transition from one programme to another"  
*synonyms:* change, move, passage, transformation, conversion, adaptation, adjustment, alteration, changeover, metamorphosis; [More](#)

*verb* NORTH AMERICAN

1. undergo or cause to undergo a process or period of transition.  
"he transitioned into filmmaking easily"



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Unlocking Early Years Leadership

# TRANSITIONS

A transition is a period of change, a process of moving through a state, a shift. There are many transitions throughout our lives, some of which can be predicted and planned, others which are unforeseen and cannot be prepared for.

Take a moment to think about the transitions you have been through in your lifetime. Consider your personal transitions, work, home, family, financial and emotional transitions for example. Some of these transitions will be the same for your peers and were predictable life transitions.

Others will be more personal to you, that others may not have experienced and which you could not have anticipated. Reflect on these different transitions; were the planned transitions easier to negotiate and work through or was anticipation of the transition difficult? Did the unpredictable transitions feel different? Were they easier or more difficult to navigate and manage?

When we think of the transition's children go through, there are so many in such a short space of time, particularly in their first 5 years of life. Many of these transitions we can predict and plan for, in an attempt to make the transition as smooth as possible and support the child through the process. Some others we cannot anticipate and have to think on our feet about the best way to help that child work through the transition.

Use the table below to list some of the transitions you have supported children with and decide whether they have been predictable or not. We have popped one in each box to help you get started.

Planned Transition	Unplanned Transition
Starting School	Death of a grandparent

For planned transitions, you may have thought about a child starting a childcare setting, moving between rooms or key person changes. Perhaps you considered the transitions relating to new siblings, moving from sleeping in their parents' room into their own room, progressing from crawling to walking or moving home. These transitions often have a time frame allowing for planning, careful consideration of how to support the child and make the transition as smooth as possible, reducing any negative affects on the child.

Unpredictable transitions may include things such as the death of a family member, illness within the family, or parents splitting up. Eviction from the family home or a quick change to family dynamics can all be difficult to plan for, difficult to manage and carry an increased risk of being detrimental to the child.

Now consider your workforce, the team you lead and manage. What transitions might they experience, both predictable and less so? There will be some common transitions between children and adults, such as the death of a family member or moving home, but there will be others that are only happen as we become adults. Think about the transitions you have seen your colleagues go through. How did forward planning or the predictability of the transition impact on how the transition was managed and the outcome?



Planned Transition	Unplanned Transition
Starting a new job	Unplanned pregnancy



## Supporting transitions

It's clear that throughout our lives we experience many transitions, some of which we will sail through without batting an eyelid, others may take a little more support, guidance and encouragement.



As we are early years leaders, we will focus this toolkit on two groups; Children aged under 5 and early years practitioners. Clearly, we cannot attempt to cover every transition that may be experienced, however there will be some common transitions which we can discuss and reflect on, thinking about the strategies we can use to support these transitions. Such strategies will no doubt be useful in other situations too.



## Starting a new setting



Starting an early years setting is one of the most common transitions a young child will go through. The support a child needs throughout this transition will depend very much upon their previous experiences, their cultural capital. A child who has never been left with an unfamiliar adult, never attended busy playgroups, and perhaps only ever been with one parent for the majority of their life will have a different experience transitioning to a new setting than a child who has already attended a setting, been to a childminder or attended lots of stay and play groups.

The key to this transition is knowing the child and planning ahead.

An initial meeting with the child's parents to discuss the child's routines, likes and preferences, current interests etc will allow you to prepare ahead to structure the child's attendance to meet their routines. For example, you may find out that a new child naps for 30 minutes twice a day, prefers outdoor play, has a teddy comforter for sleep and only drinks water through a lidded beaker.

This knowledge of the child will allow you to ensure his needs are met, that he doesn't get upset through tiredness waiting for the after lunch sleep time, his preference for outdoor play can be facilitated, his comforter is within reach and a beaker is available for him to use. Think about this child's first day based on having this knowledge and understanding and consider the difference to the child without this knowledge.

Settling in sessions are also important, especially for a child who may have never experienced large groups of peers or who may never have been left without their parent before. Short settle sessions where the parent can stay and interact with the child are crucial in supporting the child through this transition. More often than not, children settle quickly as they are supported and encouraged to play alongside peers, engage in well thought through activities and feel safe in a carefully planned environment. However, this planned environment and engaging activities will only be successful with prior knowledge of the child.



If we agree that prior knowledge of the child is a crucial factor in the success of their transition, do we also agree that prior knowledge of a staff member is crucial in the success of their transition when they join our team?

Unfortunately in our experience, new practitioners are not given that same forethought, careful planning and preparations for starting their new role as they would like. We know that recruitment in the sector is at crisis point and that when you eventually find that gem of a practitioner, you grab them with both hands, get that contract signed and get them onto the rota quicker than Boris Johnson changes his stance on mask wearing. However, should we be thinking more about their cultural capital, their needs, their environment?

Take a practitioner who has joined your team straight from college. This is their first full time job and they have only experienced early years placements up to now. They are going to need more 'settle sessions' and more support to settle into the team than a practitioner who is perhaps on their third setting, been qualified a while and has some years of experience under their belt. Think about the settling in session you offer a new practitioner.



Do you provide short sessions to start with, where they get used to the new team, check out their environment, meet their peers and are supported and encouraged to ask questions and find their feet? Do they know where their coats and belongings go, do they feel engaged in what's happening across the setting and feel like their role is important to the wider team? We wouldn't just expect a new child to start on day 1, doing a full day, leave them in their room and let them get on with it would we? We also shouldn't expect this of practitioners. Take a look at your induction schedule for new team members and ensure that there is plenty of settling in time as well as time to discuss their individual needs, their cultural capital and their expectations.



## Transitioning between rooms

Another huge yet predictable transition for many children is moving between rooms within a setting. From babies to toddlers or toddlers into preschool, the change in environment, resources, staff and expectations can be overwhelming. A child may not transition with their favourite friend, they may move to a much bigger room and suddenly have to negotiate interactions with older and bigger children.



Resources are different, routines are different and they may have a new key worker too. Consider how you currently prepare a child for these transitions. It is essential that open communication with the parent takes place before any move, that parents are in agreement with the move and that they have opportunity to discuss any concerns or questions they may have. Parents should have time to meet with the new key worker and discuss their child with them, talking through the changes in routine, the different environment, expectations and activities. Children should have settle sessions in their new rooms, short sessions to help them explore and investigate their new surroundings, and begin to build relationships with their new key worker. It may also be wise for the new key worker to spend time with the child in their current room, enabling them to get to know the child in familiar routines and surroundings. Being able to observe the child during play with their peers, understand their interests and schemas will be important in the transition into the new room. Consider how you support children's transitions between rooms and what you need to do to further improve this process.





Now think about how you would support a member of your team in a similar position. Perhaps they are moving into a different room as part of their development or perhaps they have been promoted into a new role. Would you just move them and expect them to get on with it? If they are working with a new team of people, how will you support the development of that team and ensure the practitioner gels within that team? How will you encourage the practitioner to learn the new routines and get to know the children in the room? What provision will you make for them to have time to observe, reflect and learn about the new environment, their role and how they will need to adapt to the new room? What time do you offer for staff to step back from working directly with the children and take time to reflect on their transition and the support they may need in a certain area? How easy is it for staff to have time with you as a leader to discuss their needs before such a transition, to have a plan in place to support them with times to reflect and refresh these plans?

## Change in family dynamics

Whether its parents splitting up, illness within a family or even death of a close family member, this transition is one which cannot be planned for. However, it is possible to have clear processes in place to enable you to have a plan should such transitions occur. Each child will react to such a transition in a very individual way and it is impossible to know exactly how to support a child in these circumstances until it occurs. However, having the details of external agencies who can support readily available is a useful tool for when these transitions arise. Having an open door policy to talk to parents and understand the family dynamics will be essential to supporting the child. Think about what you can do to support the family as whole during their difficult time, such as extending the children's hours, or being flexible in your service offer might help ease the burden for families in crisis.



This is also true for practitioners who are experiencing unpredictable transitions. Having an open door and an empathetic ear may be all that's needed. Perhaps you need to sign post them to external agencies for support, and this may include changing their working patterns in the short term to facilitate this.

Perhaps some paid compassionate leave could be arranged or even, office duties for a while? Having regular meetings to ensure the member of staff is coping, to make any necessary adaptations or put support in place is essential.

For most early years leader's, supporting children transitions comes as second nature, its something we train in and are skilled in. However, in the hustle and bustle of busy early years life, we may forget the transitions our team also go through and the importance of supporting them. There are so many correlations between the support we offer children and the ways we can support our team, all it takes is a little thought

If you are looking for more support in your leadership journey, reach out and connect with us at [www.thekeyleadership.co.uk](http://www.thekeyleadership.co.uk)