

Focus on: Additional Learning Needs (ALN); settling in

It is important that all children are afforded the opportunity to access childcare, whilst ensuring that all possible measures are in place to maintain the safety and wellbeing of children, parents, carers and staff.

For many children, the childcare setting they are returning to, will look and feel very different and the process of separating from parents or carers may be a challenge after considerable time spent in lockdown. Children and parents or carers may also be anxious about social distancing and how this can be achieved, particularly when children have additional needs. It will be important to manage the expectations of parents and carers and to establish a shared understanding that it may not always be possible to replicate the

childcare provision offered pre COVID-19. Every possible effort should be made to provide the best childcare in the current climate. It is important to have a plan which is flexible and responsive to the needs of the child and the setting. Managing and attending childcare during a pandemic is a new experience for us all and there will be feelings of uncertainty and apprehension but the key is to have an open discussion with parents or carers **before** the child attends and to ensure that they are involved in the planning.



Here are some things to take into consideration:

What are the child's particular needs?

- What are the main challenges for meeting this child's needs?
- Are there any measures that need to be implemented from a physical perspective and any additional safety issues to be risk assessed?
- Does the child have any sensory needs and are they likely to be mouthing certain items? Perhaps their own box of toys/items that are safe, can be used just for this child. This could be part of the planning when considering the settling in period.
- This may also help with transition if staff are familiar with things the child really likes i.e. own trains, cars, this will help to reduce levels of anxiety.

Will transition from home to setting be a particular challenge?

- Transition is a major hurdle for some children and parents, so are the parents able to assist with information on how their child deals with change?
- Do parents need additional support to gain confidence, they may be very anxious about leaving their child?
- Does the child suffer with high levels of anxiety? If so, what strategies can be used to calm the child to keep anxiety to a minimum?
- What will be the child's reaction to separation from their parents at the setting? How will staff and parents handle this?
- There will be extra factors (COVID-19) limiting the settling in period from the norm. Might it be possible for parents and child to visit the setting 'out of hours' to help ease transition?
- Would photographs/videos of the different areas in the setting the child will access be helpful in preparing for the transition along with a picture of the keyworker the child will be with?

Does the child display any behaviours that increases the risk of sharing bodily fluids with staff or children: e.g. spitting, biting, and smearing, especially whilst nappy changing?

Sometimes when children become anxious, we recognise that their behaviours may change.

- All these listed behaviours need to be considered,
- What about the possibility that a child may resist having a nappy changed and may react by making their body rigid to avoid being picked up, or may throw themselves backwards unexpectedly - is this something the child does?
- Do you need additional PPE such as see through visors rather than masks?

Does the child find routines difficult or are they unable to follow routines?

- What level of understanding does the child have?
- Do they need to be addressed by their name for them to recognise they are being talked to?
- Do they understand basic verbal instructions and/or sentences?
- Do they need prompts like a visual item, or photograph, to understand what to do? For example, moving from an indoor space to outside for a child who is non-verbal, they may take their cue from seeing a picture/or actual ball. If they needed to move to a different area within the setting, what is the best way of addressing this?
- Do they struggle with the concept of time, as a minute to a child may seem a long-time?
- Will they copy what other children are doing or are they fixed in their own time and space?

Will social distancing be difficult for this child or increase their anxiety or stress?

For some children they will play on their own and are not particularly bothered about joining other children, so they will play with things on their own.

- If the child sees a toy that they want, will they take it off another child?

What are the risks to the key worker?

Behaviours and communication are key to this area, as each child will be different. Certain PPE will need to be used especially around toileting, nappy changing and clearing any bodily fluids as per the: Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for Childcare Settings¹

- Exceptional levels of hygiene are key for all childcare workers
- Space to be able to isolate a child should they become unwell
- Ensure staff stay with the same children when working in their bubble
- Keeping to smaller numbers.

Will increased hand washing be difficult to manage for this child?

- Does the child enjoy washing their hands or do they have a sensory issue around water/touch etc?
- Will they need support with this, or can they do this on their own?
- Think about songs or games that can accompany handwashing

Does this child need their own safe haven within the setting?

- How does or would the child cope with noise levels in the setting?
- Do they need their own space at times i.e. perhaps they would choose a quiet corner or somewhere that is not populated with other children, to help calm down and self-regulate when things start to become too intense for them?

Do you need a gradual build-up of time attending?

Shorter attendance periods but over a longer time may need to be planned, to allow for 'settling in' and the understanding that parent or carer will return. This is something we would usually tailor to the child's needs, but it will be more difficult as the parent will not be on hand and there will need to be a 'handing over' point.

- Could the parent or carer be asked to wait nearby, off the premises, during initial short attendance periods so they could be called upon to return quickly if there are any settling in issues?

Would a video or pictures help with transition?

- What visual aids could help the child's level of understanding?
- Always consider what may happen with regards to a 'fire drill' or sudden fire alarm, as some children may react badly to certain levels of noise and especially if not prepared.



You may also be interested in:

smalltalk (spring 2019) – The Additional Learning Needs issue; transforming expectations, experiences and outcomes for children
Nappy changing and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), *smalltalk* (autumn 2019), pg 18 – 19

See also:

Early Years Wales Policies and Procedures pack: Policy No.8: Equality and inclusion (including additional/special educational needs). To order a copy call: 029 2045 1242 or visit: <https://www.earlyyears.wales/en/shop>

References:

¹ <https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/harp/infection-prevention-and-control/guidance/accordians/docs/infection-prevention-and-control-guidance-2019-for-childcare-settings-0-5-years-in-wales-nurseries-childminding-and-playgroups/>

Further reading:

Written Statement: Implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 system <https://gov.wales/written-statement-implementation-additional-learning-needs-and-education-tribunal-wales-act-2018>

Additional Learning Needs transformation programme: a timeline <https://gov.wales/additional-learning-needs-transformation-programme-timeline>

Guidance on supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners <https://gov.wales/guidance-supporting-vulnerable-and-disadvantaged-learners>

Additional Learning Needs (special education needs) <https://gov.wales/additional-learning-needs-special-educational-needs>

Additional Learning Needs transformation programme: frequently asked questions <https://gov.wales/additional-learning-needs-transformation-programme-frequently-asked-questions>

Additional Learning Needs transformation programme: introduction <https://gov.wales/additional-learning-needs-transformation-programme-introduction>

Representatives of young people, and parents of children, lacking mental capacity consultation <https://gov.wales/representatives-young-people-and-parents-children-lacking-mental-capacity>