



National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program



Transitions: Moving in, moving up and moving on

Introduction

The vision in the *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* (DEEWR, 2009) of children's lives as characterised by belonging, being and becoming connects well with the topic of transitions. Keeping the EYLF vision in mind when developing transition policies and practices helps education and care services to stay focused on the issue from the child's perspective while managing other priorities including those of the family and the service.

The topic of transitions is particularly related to the *National Quality Standard (NQS)* (DEEWR, 2011) Quality Area 6—Collaborative partnerships with families and communities—and the following Quality Standards:

- 6.3.2:** Continuity of learning and transitions for each child are supported by sharing relevant information and clarifying responsibilities.
- 6.3.3:** Access to inclusion and support assistance is facilitated.
- 6.3.4:** The service builds relationships and engages with their local community.



Example:

Carl is ten months of age and has been at an early childhood education and care (ECEC) service for just over a week. While Carl doesn't cry when his mum leaves, his educators have noticed that he reaches out with his arms towards his mum when they hold him as she is leaving each morning. They understand that Carl is telling them by his actions that he wants to be with his mum. The educators know it is important for Carl's wellbeing to reassure him with gentle words and close physical contact at this difficult time.

Reflection

Carl's action of arms outstretched towards his mum is his way of asking the question—'Will I be safe and supported here?'

- What response is Carl getting to his question by the educators' actions and words?
- In what way do the educators' practices send a positive message to Carl and his mum?
- What are the likely outcomes for Carl from the educators' reassurance and comforting practices?
- How do these practices link with the EYLF vision?
- What if the educators decided to leave Carl alone on a rug when his mum leaves—what messages might he get? For example—'I don't feel safe and secure and the educators don't understand how I communicate my anxiousness.'

Defining transitions

Transitions are times when children move between and adapt to different spaces or places and with different people, experiences, expectations and routines. The term encompasses regular transitions across a day and those that occur at significant times in children's lives such as starting in an education and care service or starting full-time school (EYLF, p. 16).

Children may experience a range of transitions including:

- going from home and community into an ECEC service
- moving from one age grouping or room to another
- starting at a new ECEC service
- leaving an ECEC service and starting full-time school
- participating in before and after school programs when at full-time school
- moving between a universal service such as long day care and an early intervention service
- going from inside to outside time, or from play-based experiences to a routine activity or group time.

Not many adults experience the range of transitions some children deal with regularly. While adults can find transitions challenging, we sometimes have unreasonable expectations of how well children will cope with the changes they are experiencing. On the other hand, we can be sensitive to the impact of transitions for some children and take simple steps to support them in managing change.

Example:

A family day care educator plans for transitions across the day so that children have a sense of what is going to happen and when and how they can be involved. Before lunch she reminds the children that they have ten minutes or so before they will be packing up and getting ready for lunch. She has a poster that has words and photos of the 'getting ready for lunch routines' that the children like to use to remind each other about packing up, washing hands and setting the table together. Her planning allows for flexibility in relation to when lunch is served, but also provides a sense of continuity and routine that respects the children's perspective, agency and participation.

Reflection

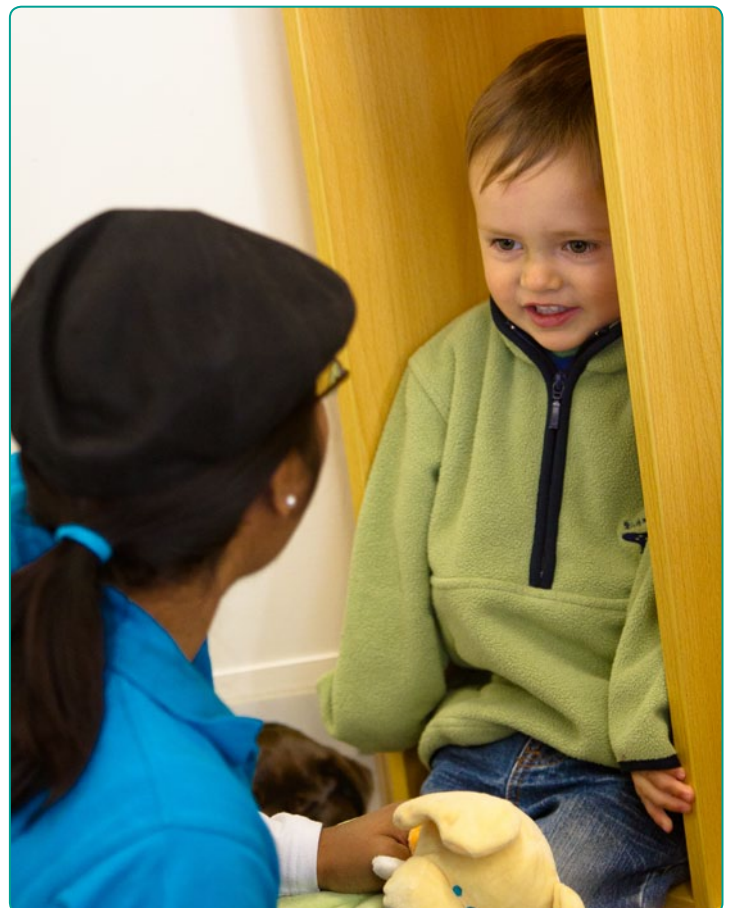
- Why is this story an example of thoughtful transition practices?
- What are children learning from these practices?
- How does this example link with the EYLF and the NQS?

Example:

Early this year Wesley (two years, six months) moved from one early childhood centre to another. In July, Wesley celebrated his third birthday and on the following Monday when he and his mum arrived at the early childhood centre they were told that Wesley would be in the three-year-old room as the centre policy is to move children up after their birthday. Both Wesley and his mum were unhappy with this decision as it has taken Wesley a long time to make two friends and they haven't moved up with him.

Reflection

- Who is advantaged by the transition policy and practice in this centre?
- Who is disadvantaged by the transition policy and practice in this centre?
- Why is it challenging for Wesley to be separated from his friends?
- How might the sudden change of rooms impact on Wesley's wellbeing and learning?
- If the policy cannot be radically changed, how could it be improved so that children and families are actively involved and informed prior to the change of rooms?





Transition challenges

Research on transition identifies both the challenges and opportunities they present for children, families and educators (Dockett & Perry, 2007). A helpful way to reflect on the challenges and opportunities of transitions is to think about them as questions from each of the key people involved. Use these questions to reflect on current practice and to consider how you can improve transition practices in your setting.

Transition challenges from the child's perspective:

- Wellbeing: Am I safe, secure and supported in this place? Do I have a friend or a champion here? Will my interests, strengths, abilities and family background be understood and responded to positively by the educators?
- Identity status: Who am I in this new place? Am I the oldest, youngest, liked, valued and seen as competent? Will I have the opportunity to build on my sense of identity, to flourish as a learner and to grow in all areas of my development?
- Roles and responsibilities: What is expected of me here? What are the rules and the acceptable ways of being in this place? Will I be included and able to contribute in meaningful ways?

From the families' perspective:

- Will my child be accepted and valued here?
- What information should I share with the service to support my child's transition into the service and throughout each day?
- Will this be a place where my child can grow and learn?
- How will my child cope with separation and unfamiliar people and different experiences?
- Will my child make friends and be happy here?
- Will our ways of being a family be respected?
- What will be expected of me and will I be able to meet those expectations?
- How will the educators know about my child's likes and dislikes and unique ways of communicating?

From the educators' perspective:

- What information do we need to share with families and children to help ensure continuity during the transition process?
- How can we individualise the transition process for families and children?
- Do our transition policies and practices support children's and families' wellbeing and positive sense of identity?
- How can we build on what children bring to this setting (strengths, interests, family traditions and knowledge)?
- How can we respect children's agency by involving them in transition practices?
- What professional learning could we undertake to improve our understanding of the significance and impact of all the transitions children experience?
- Are there community members or other professionals we could collaborate with to improve our transition practices?

Example:

Nina (five years, six months) is going to full-time school next year. Her parents are concerned about how Nina and the school will cope as her global developmental delay means she will need additional support and individualised pedagogy. The family has talked about their concerns with the educators at Nina's early childhood centre. Nina is excited about going to school because her older brother is there and some of the children in her group are also going to the same school. Over the past few months the educators have identified considerable progress in Nina's learning especially in her confidence as a learner and in her capacity to enjoy friendships through participating in play-based learning experiences with peers. They work in partnership with her parents and an early intervention therapist to provide learning experiences to improve her coordination and communication skills.

Reflection

Think about this example from different perspectives—child, parents, educators and the school.

- What are the strengths that Nina will bring to the school?
- What practical strategies could the educators use to ensure the school is informed about and ready for Nina as a learner?
- How could Nina and her family be involved in this process?
- What strategies might the school use to reassure Nina's family and to ensure continuity of learning and development for Nina?

Transition practices for different situations

Educators in many ECEC settings have developed child-focused transition practices that you might like to think about and adopt in your service. These practices are listed under transitions that apply to different situations.

Transition from home to early learning setting practices

- Adopt a primary carer system where each child is allocated to a particular educator who is the key person to support the child and family especially during the orientation period and on arrival each day.
- Be aware of power dimensions that are present in relationships between professionals, families and children, especially when you are building relationships with a new family and child. Think about the difference between 'power over' (we tell families what we expect and what they will do) and 'power with' (we work in partnership with families—listening to and responding using a two-way exchange of information and ideas).
- Allow a new child to play with a sibling or a child they know in another group as a way of supporting the child through the transition period, or enable them to spend time with an educator they know from outside the centre while they are settling in.
- Ensure educators have time to welcome children and families individually each morning and to farewell them at departure time. Greeting children and families by name and conveying strong messages of welcome every day are important transition strategies.
- Display photos of adults and children in each group, noting who is present and who is away so that children are prepared for and supported to cope with the absence of staff or friends.



Transition to a new age group or room practices

- Consult with families and older children about proposed room changes and where possible respect their opinions or requests.
- Develop policies and practices related to room or group changes based on children's best interests and not merely on children's age.
- Instead of moving children to a new room with new educators, move educator/s up with a group of children.
- Provide families and children with advance notice about any room or group changes, the reason for the change and how you will support children and families through this process.
- Ensure a child has a friend in the new group or room and encourage them to visit their 'old' room or group.
- Conduct 'orientation' visits to the new room so that children are familiar with the room, its equipment and layout before they make the move; encourage them to use new or more challenging equipment during orientation visits.

Transition to school practices

- Build partnerships with a local school so that you and the children are regular visitors to the school and the school teachers are regular visitors to your centre.
- Organise a transition-to-school community forum for families in collaboration with local schools, where teachers can provide information and talk about their school and a panel can answer families' questions.
- Participate with children and families in orientation-to-school programs.
- Talk with the outside-school-hours' coordinator and invite them to visit the children who will be using the OSHC service.
- Provide a transition to school statement for each child's school teacher that includes educator, child and family perspectives. For example, children draw a picture and you, or a parent, write what they say about the picture or themselves.
- Add school uniforms and other related resources to the home corner.
- Share stories with children about going to school and encourage discussion so that you can identify and address any concerns or clarify misunderstandings.
- Support children's learning about road and bike safety as part of school readiness planning.
- Work with a local community early years' network to generate interest and support for children starting school (for example, local businesses display posters congratulating new school entrants or they sponsor transition forums or school bags for children; local government ensures children will be safe going to and from school by providing supervised crossings and informing families about driving and parking safely near schools).
- Invite children from the previous year who are at school to talk about transition to school from their perspective. Parents of the school children can be invited to talk to this year's parents.
- As part of your literacy program, visit the school library and work with the librarian to foster book borrowing and sharing stories at the centre and at home.



Conclusion

Children are actively trying to make sense of what is happening in their lives. Shifting transition policies and practices from 'doing things to children and families' to an approach of 'collaboration and consultation with children and families' resonates with the vision in the EYLF. Children's and families' sense of belonging in a setting is strengthened by transition practices that respond to their individual interests, abilities and strengths. Recognising children's being in transition processes means seeing the present time as valuable in itself, without over emphasising preparing for the next stage or setting. Who children become in a new setting partly depends on thoughtful, respectful and well planned transition practices.

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Biography

Dr Anne Kennedy is an early childhood consultant with extensive experience as an advocate, writer, trainer, researcher and consultant. In 2012 she was the recipient of ECA's Barbara Creaser Memorial award for her significant contribution to the early childhood sector.

Coordinating Editor

Jenni Connor wrote the e-Newsletter series in 2011 and has been responsible for liaising with authors and overseeing the production of the series since 2012.

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Note: When talking about 'transition to school' in this newsletter, the author is referring to the move into full-time schooling, even though some children may have attended early childhood settings within schools prior to full-time enrolment.



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