

09 Childcare practice procedures

09.3 Prime times – The role of the key person

'Each child must be assigned a key person' (EYFS 2021)

Babies and young children need to form a secure attachment to key person when they join the setting to feel safe, happy, and eager to participate and learn.

The key person role

- A key person builds an on-going relationship with the child and his/her parents and is committed to that child's well-being while in the setting.
- Every child that attends is allocated a key person before they begin settling in – it is not the responsibility of the child to choose their own key person.
- A buddy key person is also identified for each child so that they can fulfil the role in the absence of the main key person, for example, during annual leave or sickness.
- A key person ensures that a picture of their key child is taken on their first settle and a peg picture, a drink's label and a placemat is made before the child's start date.
- Asking parents to provide family photographs to support the child with their settling in process.
- A key person conducts the progress check at age two for their key children.
- The role is fully explained to parents on induction and the name of the child's key person and buddy key person is recorded on the Key Person list which is located outside of the room, having photographs of each key person and their key groups displayed clearly.
- The key person is central to settling a child into the setting. The setting manager and key person explain the need for a settling in process and agree a plan with the parents.
- Shift patterns and staff absence can affect a child who is just settling in; where possible, settling in should be matched to when the key person is on duty.
- The number of children for each key person takes into account the individual needs of children and the capacity of the key person to manage their cohort; it is also influenced by part-time places and part-time staff. The setting manager should aim for consistency i.e. matching part-time staff to part-time children.
- **The key person spends time daily with his or her key group to ensure their well-being.**

Parents

- Key persons are the first point of contact for parents with regard to matters concerning their child and any concerns parents may have are addressed with key person in their first instance.
- Key persons support parents in their role as the child's first and most enduring educators.
- The key person is responsible for the child's developmental records, completing the progress check at age two and for sharing information about progress with the child's parents.
- The key person will set up their key children onto the 'Learning Book' and ensure parents details are added before the child's start date.

Settling sessions

- The key person always greets the parent and child.
- The parent is invited to play with their child and the key person spends time with them. As much time as possible is allowed for the key person to do this.
- Over subsequent days, depending how the child is responding, the parent is invited to attend other significant times of the day, including lunch, sleep and afternoon play.
- At this time, the key person does not change or feed the baby but observes the parent's handling of the baby and how the baby responds.
- The key person will engage the baby in eye contact but not rush to handle or hold the baby if this will cause them distress.
- The key person observes to see if the baby is recognising them, beginning to explore the environment (if able), noting what they seem to like and making sure it is available for their next settle session.

Promoting secure base

- When the young child has experienced different times of the day, these are then fitted together to establish continuity of the day.
- The parent now attends with the baby for the morning including lunch time. During this time, the key person and parent establish how the baby is getting to know the person. They note when the baby seems distressed and when the baby is happy and builds on this.
- If the baby is responding to the situation with smiles and eagerness to be held, then the baby is ready for the parent to spend short periods of time away in another part of the building. If signs of distress are still apparent then the separation will be approached more slowly, starting with the parent staying in the room, but taking a 'back seat', while the key person spends time with the baby.
- When the parent leaves, they always say goodbye and say they are coming back. Parents should never slip away without the baby noticing; this leads to greater distress.
- Gradually, time out of the room is extended from 10 to 20 minutes, and then 30 minutes.
- When baby can comfortably cope with 30 minutes, the key person and parent plan the next stage.
- Parents can be asked to bring in a recently worn tee shirt or scarf that smells of them. Babies will often settle if they can smell the familiar smell of the parent. Some parents may agree to send in a recording of a song that they sing to get their baby to sleep, especially if it is in their home language.

Promoting dependency

Attachment can be seen when the baby shows signs that they are happy to transfer their need to be dependent onto the key person. Key persons look for signs such as the baby being pleased to see them, looking for them when distressed, holding out their arms to be held, establishing eye contact, responding to play, feeding and taking comfort from the key person.

Learning and development

- The key person helps to ensure that every child's learning and care is tailored to meet their individual needs. This is achieved through regular observation and assessment of children, using information gathered about their achievements, interests and learning styles to plan for each individual child's learning and development.
- If a child's progress in any of the prime areas gives cause for concern, the key person must discuss this with the setting manager or SENCO and the child's parent's.

Prime times

The key person role is explained further in the prime time procedures (09.4/6/7/8/10/14); the key person also maintains other responsibilities for key children including making sure accident records are completed before sharing with parent/carers and key children are checked in on arrival.

Buddy key person

- The role of the buddy key person is to step in when the main key person is absent or unavailable to provide a stable and consistent care relationship for the child.
- The buddy key person is identified when the child starts but is not introduced to the child until an attachment is beginning to form with the key person.
- The buddy key person gradually forms a relationship with the child until the child is happy to be cared for by this person.
- The buddy key person shares information with parents in the key person's absence and makes notes in the child's records where appropriate.
- The buddy key person ensures information is shared with the key person.

Safeguarding children

- The key person has a responsibility towards their key children to report any concern about their development, welfare or child protection matter to the setting manager and to follow the procedures in this respect.
- Regular supervision with the setting manager provides further opportunities to discuss the progress and welfare of key children.
- The buddy key person has a duty likewise.