Transitions for babies and toddlers

The first few years of a child's life are full of big and small transitions. A successful transition is when a baby or toddler feels confident, comfortable, engaged and included in their environment.

Wellbeing

Transitions are key opportunities to support babies' and toddlers' wellbeing. While some transitions can be significant events, such as starting at an early learning service for the first time, there are also many important smaller, daily transitions. These include saying goodbye to family in the morning or moving from play to a care routine, such as meal or sleep time.

Belonging

The relationships and interactions children experience though transitions can support their sense of belonging.

These relationships include the bonds between children and their primary caregivers and those with their educators, peers, siblings and extended family members. Research suggests practices encouraging agency, autonomy and participation in groups can foster belonging and positive transition experiences for babies and toddlers.

Care routines and rituals

Embedding rituals as babies and toddlers move in and out of care routines during the day can support their feelings of security. Rituals incorporate a sequence of familiar actions, which promote affection and care, and create a warm connection. When an educator or primary carer is available and tuned in to the child at these times, they can be responsive to a child's cues. In this way, the adult and child work in partnership and foster the child's sense of self and agency.

A supportive transition begins with an *invitation* into a care moment: *"Ali, I think you might need a nappy change, can you come to the bathroom with me?"* Other cues that can support the child include opening hands towards the child and pausing to give the child time to process what's happening and respond. Through slow, gentle movements and

respectful verbal cues a young child is more likely to experience a sense of safety, belonging and agency.

Relationships and separations

Babies and toddlers can express discomfort when separating from their significant caregivers. This is often a positive sign the child and caregiver have a secure attachment relationship. These relationships can support babies and toddlers with their emerging ability to self-regulate, through a process known as co-regulation.

Co-regulation can happen when an educator or primary carer responds to a child's cues by acknowledging what may be happening and reassuring them. Educators can support transitions that involve separation of a child from family members through co-regulation. For example, when a toddler cries and an educator responds with *"Oh are you crying? You will miss your [caregiver] while they're away, you will be safe with me. Would you like to have a hug?"*

Co-regulation can be strengthened though consistent and predicable interactions between babies and toddlers and their caregivers. When educators learn how families support separations – such as the use of transition objects, toys and comforters – a continuity of care is established that may make transitions and separations smoother. In this way the important relationship between families and educators can support the child's sense of belonging and security.

Partnerships with families

Developing trust with families is vital to support the transition experiences of babies and toddlers. How families feel about transitions influence how a child experiences these times. Partnerships with families are enhanced through open communication and the reciprocal sharing of information at key times – such as when a child first starts in an early learning service, and at daily arrival and departure times.

Through meaningful conversations, educators can gain an understanding of a child's home routines and daily wellbeing. For example, sharing information about the child's day at departure times will enable families to know what the child has experienced, and

help them be prepared for the rest of the day. Digital and written communication tools can help with the sharing of information.

Transition policies support the development of trusting relationships with families and a child's transition experiences. For example, a policy that sets up a consistent educator approach and dialogue between families and educators during transition times.

Supporting transitions

Practices that support babies and toddlers, and their families – and which are particularly effective during transition times – include:

- Educators who are consistently warm, responsive, attentive, physically and emotionally available to children
- A consistent educator approach: familiar adults provided through continuity of staffing
- Extra educators available at transition times
- Time and resources set aside for the development of attachments between educators and children, getting to know babies and toddlers to understand and respond to their cues
- Ongoing respectful, reciprocal and responsive communication with families
- Taking time to learn about the care routines and rituals, interests, preferences, communication styles and a child's ways of being at home
- Dedicated time and resources to plan for transitions and the development of transition policies and procedures
- Pedagogy which fosters an infant or toddler's autonomy, agency, sense of self and participation in groups
- Respectful interactions with babies and toddlers allowing them to show agency and autonomy during transition periods.

References

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External links

Early Childhood Australia - The Circle of Security: Roadmap to building supportive relationships

Early Childhood Australia - Transitions in children's everyday lives