

TRANSITION IN THE EARLY YEARS



COMMUNICATION FRIENDLY SPACES™

CFS™ TRANSITION IN THE EARLY YEARS

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The Communication Friendly Spaces™ (CFS™) Approach helps to create effective learning environments for children, young people and adults. This guidance paper is one in a series about the way that the environment can affect behaviour, communication, emotional well-being and general engagement. Getting the environment right for learners contributes to their overall achievement.



WHY IS TRANSITION SO IMPORTANT?

Transition is the process that children and adults go through when changes occur in their lives. Even when the change is desirable, transition can be a very unsettling time because it is not just about new beginnings, which can feel very exciting, but also about endings which can feel extremely worrying. During times of transition feelings of loss, fear and anxiety can accompany the positive feelings of excitement and anticipation. For young children especially, unless transition is understood and sensitively managed, transferring to a new nursery, school or other situation can be a very difficult experience. (Centre for Community Child Health 2008)

Recent research from Bath University shows that children's levels of the stress hormone cortisol, increase significantly during the transition to school (Turner-Cobb 2005) and these increased levels can affect attention and brain function, particularly for vulnerable children (Balbernie 2007). Key protective factors, which ensure children's well-being in the learning environment, were identified in 2001 by Hartley-Brewer for the Institute for Public Policy Research. They are security, which includes feeling physically and emotionally safe, significance, which is perceived by feeling special to someone, and connection, which is achieved through being and feeling accepted. The National Strategies SEAD (Social and Emotional Aspects of Development) Guidance makes it clear that good social and emotional development has a huge impact on later well-being, learning, achievement and that fostering this development is vitally important during transition into an early years setting.

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CREATING THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT FOR TRANSITION

Environments which are designed to support children and families during times of transition will enable communication, emotional well-being and general engagement to happen and help transition to be a time of excitement and challenge rather than being difficult and stressful. The Bath University research emphasises the particular importance of providing environments where shy or quiet children are able to express themselves during transition to school. The SEAD Guidance document acknowledges that starting nursery or school is a stressful time for many children and that physical and emotional environments where children feel safe, cared for and relaxed and are with adults who are 'tuned in' to their individual needs is key to their well-being and development.

The Communication Friendly Spaces™ Approach helps the process of transition to be as smooth as possible for children and families by encouraging a calming, welcoming and stimulating environment to be created which takes account of children's preferred learning contexts. Using the approach will enable you to consider, through observation and reflection, how your environment is currently affecting children and their families and how it could be adapted to create the best possible space for transition to happen.

A good starting point is to have a look at the whole environment, both indoors and outdoors, which you are providing for children. Look at it from the child's perspective as well as the adult's - taking photographs and video footage can be very useful to get a real picture of the environment.



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AUDIT YOUR ENVIRONMENT:

When children and families are new to your setting, what does it look like and feel from their point of view?



IS YOUR ENTRANCE AREA WELCOMING?

The entrance is usually the first experience of the setting for children and families. Large open spaces and high ceilings may not feel 'emotionally safe' for some children, and can make them feel exposed and unsure. Cramped spaces and corridors can feel very overwhelming when a lot of people are using them at the start of a session. How does movement flow in your reception area? Are there any spaces for children to 'watch from' before they go in? Think about how these spaces could be made more welcoming and homely by careful use of space, colour and resources.

EYFS – Enabling Environments

Involve parents at transition times, valuing what they say and encouraging them to stay with their children while they settle in.

STOP AND THINK:

What do you notice about your environment?

What does it look like from the child's perspective?

What does it look like from an adult viewpoint?

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IS THE ENVIRONMENT FULL OF RESOURCES, BRIGHT COLOURS, POSTERS AND DISPLAYS?

Too many, or poorly stored and displayed resources and a very bright and colourful environment can be very overwhelming for both children and adults who might already be feeling anxious and unsure. A calmer environment can be created by careful choice of colours such as pastel shades of green and blue and more neutral colours. A small amount of intriguing and unusual resources could capture attention and interest more effectively. They could be chosen to reflect links with the home environment, thus reflecting family cultures.

ARE THERE DIFFERENT SPACES THAT CAN BE EASILY ACCESSED, INCLUDING OUTDOOR SPACES?

We all have preferences about the kinds of spaces we like to be in, especially at times of stress. Children need to have spaces that help them feel secure and relaxed at times of transition.



EYFS – Enabling Environments

Children's social, emotional and educational needs are central to any transition between one setting and another or within one setting.

EYFS – Enabling Environments

When children's physical and emotional needs are met they are more likely to take advantage of the play and learning opportunities on offer.

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ARE THERE SOFT, COMFORTABLE SPACES, CONTAINED OR PRIVATE SPACES?

Children can feel gently nurtured in soft, comfortable spaces. Research from Harvard University has made strong links between softness and emotional independence for children. Spaces which provide physical containment can also provide the emotional containment which offers security and comfort. Being able to access somewhere small, perhaps contained and private, somewhere to observe from, can be very important for children, especially as they make the transition into a setting or school from home, or from one space to another within the setting. Have you got spaces like this which adults can also access with children or where they can talk to practitioners during the settling in process?

EYFS – Positive Relationships

Imagine what your setting seems like to a parent and their child when they first arrive. It may seem busy, friendly, noisy, lively, exciting and fun to you. How might it seem to a five-year-old or an anxious parent?



EYFS – Enabling Environments

Where possible link the indoor and outdoor environments so that children can move freely between them.

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IS THE ENVIRONMENT UNDULY NOISY?

Many children are extremely sensitive to noise and this can make them anxious when spending time in environments that are busy, frantic and loud. It can be helpful to create some quiet, calm spaces both inside and outside for children to use to make transition from one area to another or to withdraw to when they need to.



IS LIGHTING USED TO ENHANCE THE ENVIRONMENT?

Natural daylight has a calming, meditative effect and contributes to health and well-being. Muted light can be relaxing, cosy and safe and enables children to stay engaged in a comfortable environment.

EYFS - Learning and Development

To be mentally or physically engaged in learning, children need to feel at ease, secure and confident.

EYFS – Enabling Environments

Create an indoor environment which is re-assuring and comforting for all children

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STOP AND THINK:

What are your CFS™ priorities?

- What three things could you change now to support transition?
- Talk to parents/carers and children and other people who come into your setting and find out how they feel in the environment
- Use their opinions, your reflections and observations to make informed changes that will ensure the best possible outcomes for the children you work with.

For more information please visit
www.elizabethjarmanltd.co.uk

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