



# The Early Years Centre Nursery Settling-in Policy

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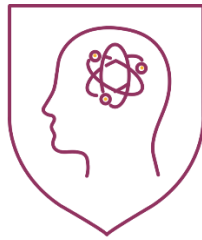
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## 1. Introduction

At GEMS Wellington Academy Al Khail, we understand that the first few days at Nursery can be difficult for both, parents and children. Young children often find it challenging to adjust to new environments, especially if they are separated from their primary caregiver. Separation anxiety is very natural in children, and the Nursery Team is well experienced in dealing with this. We respect that every child is different, and their unique experiences prior to starting Nursery may contribute to their confidence or anxiety. Working together with parents is essential to ensure that the child's individual needs are met during the settling in process. We are trained to understand the individual needs of each child and how best to support them during this critical period.

## 2. Aims and Objectives

- To provide information around the settling-in period for staff and parents.
- To ensure that children have a key person in the Nursery and feel safe, secure and happy in the environment.
- To help parents feel assured of the importance of their child's happiness and wellbeing and help them to have a positive start when leaving their child at Nursery, particularly for the first few weeks.

## 3. Methods

### a) Induction Meetings

- Before children can start at the Nursery, a teacher will carry out an Induction Session to meet the children and parent and assess if the Nursery can meet the needs of the child. At this meeting, we will discuss individual interests, needs and routines to help us prepare ahead of each child's arrival. This also gives us the chance to let the family to become familiar with the Nursery environment.
- Parents fill out a detailed Parent questionnaire including information about the child's development and early developmental experiences (e.g. birth process, first steps, first words, etc.). The questionnaire and Induction Meeting will give the Education Team an insight into the child's developmental level and needs.
- During the meeting parents receive information about the Nursery and particularly the settling-in process to support a positive start.
- Induction meetings should not interfere with the education provision and care given to children



already attending the Nursery.

#### b) Welcome Email

Prior to starting Nursery parents receive a welcome email. The email will include information about the Nursery and the Education Team, but most importantly, should set a warm and positive tone to welcome a family to the Academy. Information that needs to be included (but not limited to):

- Parents' Guide
- Academic Calendar/term times
- Nursery Timetable
- Details about settling in and the drop-off and pick-up process
- Team overview and teacher profiles
- What to bring and provide
- Our information on communication platforms (Seesaw, GEMS Connect)
- Tips for starting Nursery
- Contact details and social media address (school, medical team, Instagram account)
- Information on the 'Healthy Eating' policy

#### c) Settling in Period

During the settling-in process, the Education Team spends time getting to know the child and their individual needs. We provide a safe and nurturing environment for the child to explore and build trust with the adults. This process allows the child to gradually become comfortable in the new setting and feel secure enough to separate from their parent.

Based on the Pikler\* model, we recommend that all children begin with short hours and gradually extend the hours as the child becomes increasingly comfortable with the new adults, children and environment. The settling-in process in the Pikler model is an essential part of building a secure attachment between the child and their caregiver in the Nursery. This process is given a minimum time scale of two weeks for each child, but it can last for as long as necessary for the child to feel comfortable and secure without their parent.

The Pikler model acknowledges that each child is unique, and that the settling-in process may take longer for some children than others. Therefore, it is important to be flexible and allow the child to establish a secure secondary attachment to their key person in the Nursery. By prioritising the settling-in process, the Pikler model aims to build strong, positive relationships between the child and their caregiver in the setting.

At the Academy most children start Nursery on the first day of the academic year. Hence children will be allocated to 2-hour settling-in time slots to reduce the group size and the time initially spent at the Nursery to facilitate bonding time with the Education Team. Parents will be asked to wait outside of the Nursery, but close by, and will be provided with regular updates of their child's well-being. If a child is very upset, we will inform parents and give them the option to collect early. New joiners during the academic year can be accompanied by the parent into class for a gentle, gradual hand-over.



\* Emmi Pikler was a Hungarian paediatrician and author who is best known for her work in the field of infant development and care. Pikler's approach to infant care and education was based on the idea that children are competent active learners who should be allowed to develop at their own pace. She believed in the importance of building strong positive relationships between caregivers and children and emphasised the role of play and exploration in learning. Pikler developed a set of principles for infant care and education that are known as the Pikler Approach. This approach emphasises the importance of respectful responsive caregiving; uninterrupted play and exploration time; and building strong secure attachments between caregivers and children.

### Attachment Theory

Research has shown that a secure attachment to a primary caregiver is crucial for an infant's feelings of security and competence. An infant's early experiences with primary caregivers can influence the formation of neurobiological patterns that affect their ability to regulate responses to others and can condition their relationships in future life.

John Bowlby is widely credited as the founder of Attachment Theory that states that infants form an attachment to their primary caregiver, usually their mother, because of the caregiver's consistent and responsive caregiving. Bowlby believed that this attachment is essential for a child's emotional security, which can then impact their future relationships and overall well-being. Bowlby's theory can be applied in practice, particularly in childcare/education to help support children's emotional and social development, and to facilitate healthy relationships.

When a child is consistently cared for and responded to by a caregiver, they learn that their needs are important and that they can rely on the caregiver for support. This relationship builds a strong foundation for the child's sense of self-worth and confidence. Moreover, consistent interactions with a caregiver create a secure attachment between the child and the caregiver. This attachment helps the child regulate their emotions, feel safe, and explore their environment more confidently.

### Key Persons

On the first day of Nursery, children will be received by a team member of the Education Team. The team will collaborate to ensure that every family will experience consistency with the person welcoming them in the morning and during pick up. Emmi Pikler advocated that each child should have a consistent primary caregiver who is responsible for the child's care, communication with families, and documentation of their development and learning. This enables the primary caregiver to develop a deep understanding of the child's verbal and non-verbal cues and behaviours, which in turn allows for responsive, cooperative, and predictable caregiving.

Article 3 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child states, that "When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children. All adults should do what is best for children." Although the Education Team will thrive towards attending to the same children each day to form a secure bond, children should be given the opportunity to self-select their key person. Considering children's viewpoints and allowing them to self-select their key person, can have a positive impact on bonding process, their development and overall well-being. When a child is naturally drawn to a specific caregiver, they are more likely to build a secure attachment and trust with that person, which can enhance their



emotional, social, and cognitive development. Moreover, affection between caregiver and child must be mutual and the caregiver needs to be consistently responsive. Building secondary secure attachments takes time – every effort needs to be taken to not interrupt the bonding process.

Based on the work and approach of Emmi Pikler, during settling in (but also thereafter) we will:

- **Give children our full attention** – tune in, observe and know their characteristics, interests and level of development. The Education Team will collaborate so that each child is cared for, and adults can focus on specific children one at a time.
- **Slow down** – do not rush through activities, provide a calm and peaceful environment, be gentle, respectful and do not forcefully distract children with toys.
- **Build trust and relationships** – tune in, children send us messages, we need to listen and respond to their cues.
- **Talk ‘with’ children and not ‘to’ children** – children can be active participants of their play, be patient and step away to let children make their own decisions, communicate with children during care routines (e.g. nappy changes), tell them what you are going to do.
- **Allow uninterrupted time to play** – we refrain from ushering children into adult driven activities but follow the children’s play cues.

#### Providing a consistent social and physical environment

To support the bonding process not just between the key person and child but also between children, we will provide a consistent environment – socially and physically. During the settling-in period, groups of children will be kept small and children will play within a consistent environment. Unnecessary changes of rooms and groups of children will be avoided to give children space and time to become familiar with the Education Team, their peers and their environment. This approach will support uninterrupted play with children feeling relaxed and stress free. Research by Hutt et.al (in Santer & Griffiths (2007) suggests that the quality of play increases once children got to know one another and were in a positive affective state.

#### Key Teacher – class group

After the settling in period, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of term 1, children will be assigned to class groups with a key teacher. The key person approach will increasingly take the shape of ‘key caring’, with a team of adults sharing the responsibility of key elements of the child’s development and care and thus, the relationship will not be affected by staff absences/other engagements.

Every effort should be made to respect the children’s self-chosen key person and the Education Team will carefully consider the children’s needs and nature of existing relationships between children as well as children and adults when assigning children to groups.

However, this does not mean children will be restricted when choosing other rooms, adults and peers outside of their class group to interact with. We believe that once a child feels safe enough, they will want to explore and interact with others within the entire Nursery setting. With knowing that there is a secure base, their key teacher they can turn towards, they will be more open to engage with others outside of their class group.

#### Supporting parents



Separating from their children can be a big concern for parents, which we will respond to sensitively, addressing their concerns and anxieties. Each parent may experience the moment of separation differently and needs the support of their key person. The key person approach is equally important to parents and the Education Team will need patience to build relationships with parents and help them manage their emotions.

#### What the Nursery expects of The Nursery Manager:

- Provide parents with a comfortable and welcoming waiting space.
- Assure parents by explaining the key person approach and support with personalised strategies (e.g. bringing in comforters, photos of children, a quick vs. slow goodbye, etc.).
- Provide parents with frequent feedback during the settling in period and share photos of children who are starting to explore the resources on offer.
- Provide support by introducing parents to one another and start building the Nursery community.
- If needed, provide a private space to share confidential concerns. Parents should know that we value home languages – colleagues or technology can be used for translations to help parents express their concerns and emotions in their native tongue.
- Support the Education Team with addressing parents' concerns.
- Provide information about policies and routines in the Nursery.

#### What the Nursery expects of The Education Team:

- Be positive, patient and understanding during handover to reduce anxieties parents may have.
- Be confident during handover to guide parents with hand-over strategies.
- Acknowledge parents' feelings and concerns and address these sensitively.
- Every effort for the same person every day to receive and send off children needs to be made.
- During pick-up, give feedback about the child's progress with settling in. It is important to be transparent and honest with parents. Discussions about the settling in strategies may need to be revisited several times to help parents build and maintain their confidence with the approach.
- Provide daily photographs on Seesaw to give parents an insight into their child's time at the Nursery.
- Call parents of bus children to provide feedback.
- Be available for personal/online/phone meetings to give specific feedback to parents on how their child has settled in and agree on next steps in learning.
- Take children's separation anxieties seriously, do not forcefully distract them but talk with children about their home, parents and family (e.g., look at pictures brought from home, ask questions related to parents and siblings). Children have the right to be sad and angry and express their emotions. The key person will be close by to give comfort if wanted by the child.
- Inform parents when the child is overwhelmed and exhausted and needs to be back in the care of their parent.



What the Nursery expects of parents:

- Prepare their child for their start to Nursery (refer to 'Tips for starting your Nursery Journey')
- Provide updated information about their child's self-care needs and skills (toileting, sleep, eating).
- Provide spare clothes, toileting supplies, emergency slippers, snack/lunch, bedding, all labelled.
- Follow the Nursery's time schedule for the child's settling in slot, drop-off and pick-up times.
- Support their child with unpacking their snack/lunch, placing it on the trolley and taking off shoes.
- Be positive and confident during hand over – children pick up on the anxieties of their parents and will feel that the Nursery is not safe, or the Team is not trusted by the parents.
- Be honest and transparent: no false promises about bringing presents during pick up to bribe children, just using the bathroom and coming back immediately; no sneaking out – a child needs to trust that their parents inform them when they are leaving.
- Be open to following advice on settling-in strategies.
- Support the Education Team in their efforts to build a relationship with their child. Be assured that the bond that the child forms with their key person will not be at the expense of their attachments to their parents and family members.

#### **4. Initial Assessment and Identification of Needs**

During the first 2 weeks, the Education Team will observe the children's developmental levels and use their professional judgement to identify any needs that need to be addressed for further specialised observation and intervention.

Where staff feel that a child requires additional support or early intervention, the Nursery Manager will forward the observation notes to the SENCo followed by an observation by the SENCo and a screener, if needed. Parents will be notified if the Education Team feel that this support is needed.

The SENCo will support the Education Team with formulating next steps and strategies to continue the settling in period and start their Nursery journey and liaise with Therapy Centres if more specialised intervention is needed for individual children.



## References:

Santer, J., & Griffiths, C. (2007). *Free play in early childhood: a literature review*. National Children's Bureau. <http://www.playengland.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/free-play-in-early-childhood.pdf>

The Convention on the Rights of the Child: The children's version (2023). Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text-childrens-version> (Accessed: 4 July 2023).