

The first few weeks when a child is settling into a nursery setting is a time of crucial importance to their later happiness in the setting. All children are individuals and while some children will adjust fairly easily to the new environment and new routines, others will take longer to feel comfortable and secure.

Sometimes we can overestimate a young child's ability to cope with starting nursery and spending time away from parents or other familiar care givers. The lure of the toys doesn't always compensate! Being left at nursery can be a difficult time for some children, especially if they have not had experience of another form of care outside of the family. Most children settle in without too many concerns but there are some children who need more time to develop trust.

As parents and as nursery practitioners, we can take steps to ensure that the transition into the early years setting goes as smoothly as possible.

Separation anxiety is a healthy and protective emotion. It is the child's way of saying "You are my safe base and I need to develop trust and confidence in other carers."

Recognising separation anxiety is a good starting point. It means you can prepare and allow both you and your child to feel confident and happy.

Visiting the nursery to look around and attending settler sessions will provide you and your child with an introduction to the new environment, allowing you both to meet the staff and make a positive start to the transition process.

All Birkbees settings have a 'Settling In' policy which sets out our procedures for supporting children through the settling in stage. The policy is written with the child's emotional well-being at the heart. You can have a copy of this policy and familiarise yourself with it, as it will help you prepare for your child's transition into nursery and make any necessary arrangements.

We will give parents an Information Booklet which includes the types of activities provided for the children and the daily routines. It is good to familiarise yourself with this also, as you can talk to your child positively about the sorts of activities they will be engaging in during their time in the setting. Like adults, children need reassurance and it is good to talk through the daily routines and let them know when you will pick them up, for example, after story time or after tea.

Preparing for separation could involve leaving your child with trusted friends or family members for short periods. This can then be followed by settling in sessions within the nursery.

Although you may be feeling as anxious and emotional as your child, try to stay cheery and confident as children will pick up on your feelings of apprehension. Nursery staff are used to comforting parents as they leave their children for the first time!

It is important when your child starts the early years setting to let the child know when you are leaving and that you are going to come back. Just sneaking out can lessen the child's trust and they may take longer to settle.

Open communication between parents and the nursery staff team is crucial. It is important to share information with your child's key person. Parents can give the staff information about the child and in turn the staff can talk to the parents about the child's experiences in the setting.

Practitioners have a vast amount of experience in helping children settle into nursery and are aware of the difficulties that can emerge during this transition period.

If your child is taking longer to settle in than you had expected and you still have concerns, discuss these with a member of staff. Together you can agree on and put into place strategies to support your child during this time.