

Introduction

Having a child is very much a journey. A key stage in this journey is the moment when your child begins Nursery for the first time. If children are carefully prepared they can settle in without much ado. So what preparation needs to be taken place?

A good starting point is to understand that young children are actually primed to stay close to their parents or main carer. From the age of around eight months onwards until three years and older, children normally react when their parents leave by crying and protesting. In evolutionary terms, it made perfect sense for youngsters to remain near their parents to avoid danger.

Settling in

In order to prevent your child from becoming distressed when they first leave you, Keyworkers will work with you to settle your child in. You and your child will be invited to visit and attend a few sessions before the actual start date.

Visiting a few times before actually leaving your child is essential. It allows your child to become familiar with the new surroundings and get to know the staff. To help your child settle in, we use a 'keyworker' system that means that one person will take special care of your child in the early days.

Helping your child

There are several ways in which you can help your child to settle in smoothly.

- It is important during visits to Westmill Nursery that you are ready to take a step backwards and allow the staff to build a relationship with your child. Constantly playing alongside your child may mislead them into believing that in this new place, you will always be there to play. Instead, your child needs to learn that this new place is one where they can enjoy playing with other children and being with staff.
- Speak positively to your child about starting Nursery. Children pick up very easily on any negative thoughts you may be having.
- While it is important that you should stay during the first visits, aim bit by bit to physically distance your self from your child by, for example, wandering to the edge of the room and picking up a book or talking to another parent or child.

Taking the cue

Children are programmed to pick up on our reactions. If children notice that we smile and are relaxed in the company of the staff, they will take this as a cue that it is fine to stay. They will also notice and react if we appear anxious, and may respond by becoming fearful and clingy. While most parents are naturally a little anxious about how their children will get on, try hard to remain calm and positive, as this too will rub off on your child.

Going at different speeds

Most parents wonder how quickly they can leave their children. Remember that this is not a race, however. The child who settles in gradually but without tears will have learned a valuable lesson that will stand them in good stead when they start school. It can be useful once you start leaving your child to build up the amount of time slowly. You might start by telling the child during an early visit that you want to go to another room for a couple of minutes and then return. (It is advisable to speak to a member of staff before you do this so any preparations can be made). If your child copes with that, then you can then keep increasing the time.

Records and Planning

General observations are recorded each session on how your child is progressing with settling in. Your child's Keyworker will share these with you, giving you the opportunity to contribute on how they have been at home and planning strategies for future sessions. A copy of these notes will be given to you once your child is fully settled.

Sneaking off

Finally, a word about sneaking off! This might seem like a good idea, especially if your child is happily playing, but in the longer term it can cause quite a few problems. When children stop playing and notice that their parent is no longer there, they can react by becoming increasingly clingy. It also means that in any future situations, instead of settling down to play, children keep a watchful eye on their parents. Aim instead to build a 'goodbye' routine so that your child knows that you are going, but is confident that you will always come back.