

Importance of a well-planned settling-in period



*Building the child a bridge
Peter Bauer in: TPS 5/199*

When a child makes the transition from life at home to the usually unfamiliar world of the daycare centre, we are aware that this represents a significant change for the whole family, and often brings with it feelings of uncertainty, apprehension and curiosity as well as plenty of questions. This is why we take the greatest possible care in planning the settling-in period.

As it is a considerable challenge for your child to adapt to a new environment and build relationships with new people, it is essential that we can rely on close cooperation with you as parents during the settling in period. It is also vital that either a parent or another person close to the child stays with the child during her initial sessions.

For us, it is important to build a relationship with your child in which she feels oriented and secure in order to be able to adapt to her new environment. We therefore gently verbalise to the child that we notice when, for example, she is confused or happy. This signals that we take the child's feelings seriously and that we are there for her.

The carer monitors the situation and the child. She reacts to the child's initial attempts at contact, such as the first eye contact or smile that each child offers sooner or later. The child determines the pace and form of contact. The carer will perhaps offer to play something with your child but will leave it to her whether she wishes to accept. It is important that the child is free to choose her own activities, to play and discover as she wishes, and is not forced into any set form of behaviour. The aim is for the child to build a relationship to the carer in line with her own stage of development, slowly and without pressure, in order that she feels safe and cared for in the future too.

The ability of our carers to be able to read the slightest indication of the children's feelings is one of our most important instruments, as is our recognition of and support/guidance for feelings like the fear of loss and separation that are felt by parents and children alike.

Spending a lot of time together – as is possible during the settling in period in our daycare centres – allows the parents and child to gradually grow familiar with the new carer, the other children in the group, the rooms, and the daily routine. Every day we get to know you and your child a little better. In order to give these relationships a solid foundation, we also ensure that the same person from the centre is assigned to you and your child.

Please note that any interruption in the child's attendance can prolong the settling-in period. For this reason, please do not schedule any vacations during this time to allow your child time to settle in.

As a rule, the settling-in process lasts between 3 and 6 weeks and is carried out on as many days of the week as possible. The lengthy timespan enables the child to get used to the new environment and personal carer slowly, without pressure and in line with her own stage of development.

From the point at which the child spends time alone in the daycare centre, the parents must be reachable at any time and be able to get to the centre in a short time.

It is important that the handovers when arriving and leaving are carefully planned and can be carried out effectively. Be clear to say goodbye to your child and take care that she realises you are leaving. You must avoid saying goodbye several times and then returning for this could lead to your child no longer expecting you to leave, making it harder to actually say goodbye.

The carer assigned to your child's settling-in period is also available for you as parents and will support you if you find the handovers difficult.

When you return, greet your child, and give her enough time to finish playing if necessary.

It is often helpful for the child if the handovers are backed up by a ritual or a familiar object such as a comfort cloth or a cuddly toy.

We look forward to sharing this meaningful time of getting to know you and your child and are confident that a sustainable relationship will develop.