**The Willow Tree Children’s Centre**

**Settling In Policy**

We recognise that successful experiences during early transitions can increase a child’s abilityto adapt to changes in the future and can provide a more secure base for their learning and development. We work to develop strong relationships between the family and the service through frequent communication and sharing of information and goals.

Strong connections between each child’s home and the service help ease transitions into new or different settings, routines and/or relationships. We maintain continuity of relationships as far as possible and carefully plan all introductions to new settings, routines and experiences for the children to help ease any anxiety associated with change. We do our best to ensure that we provide a secure base that supports the children’s focused attention, curiosity about exploring their world and their emerging independence.

Major transitions are not one-off events. These transitions go on over a period of time and everything that a young child experiences prepares them for other transitions to come. We consider it essential to enable parents and our early years staff to jointly support and facilitate successful transitions through responsive relationships that are secure, consistent and continuous. All predictable transitions are planned with sensitivity to each child’s individual needs and interests, and children are supported to develop the dispositions and skills needed to make major transitions successful.

We aim to provide relationships and routines that are consistent, predictable, and responsive to support each child's sense of trust, security, and identity. We consider it essential that the staff member assigned to their care (their Key Person) can read and respond to each child's cues.

We always:

* Consider transitions from the perspective of the wellbeing, learning and development needs of each child.
* Assign a Key Person to each child. Consider particular health and development needs of each child.
* Build partnerships with families to support the development of responsive, respectful relationships among children and staff.
* Individualise routines and practices to support each child's needs, interests, temperament, their own and their family’s circumstances and their preferences, their culture and first language.
* Use routines and transitions as opportunities to promote children’s learning and development.
* Plan for transitions and placements that provide consistency and continuity for children and their families.
* Evaluate the quality and effectiveness of transitions using various means, including observations of the children and feedback from their families.
* Support parents in being or becoming advocates as they transition with their children both into this service from home or other settings *[such as a childminder]* and from this service to other settings, especially school.
* Ensure the most appropriate transition to other environments and services from participation in this service by beginning transition planningas early as possible prior to the child's move.
* Liaise with other settings appropriately and provide any relevant information (via parents or with parents’ consent) that is helpful in ensuring a successful transition from this service to other settings such as school.

Procedures & Practices

On entry to the service we:

* Encourage parents/guardians to visit The Willow Tree Children’s Centre before and after their child is enrolled.
* Include the Key Person in the *admission/enrollment* meeting and make plans with parents at that time to ease the child's transition and settling in to the programme.
* Introduce each child and their parents to the environment, the adults and the other children who will be in their programme /room and the daily routines.
* Invite parents to take an active role in settling their child into the service (If parents/guardians can help their child, they will also ease their own feelings of separation.)
* Request information from parents which will help us to get to know their child such as the child’s likes and dislikes; their particular needs; who the important people in their lives are; their interests; their ability to communicate; their temperament and their dispositions and importantly, whether they have a special transitional object (such as a ‘blankie’). (See checklist for exchanging information below.)
* Encourage parents to settle their child into an activity and say goodbye promptly. We have noticed that the longer the parent stays in the room, the stronger the separation anxiety which can ensue.
* Post a sign welcoming the child and the parents by name and include photos where possible.
* Empathise with parents’ concerns about leaving their child in our care.

#### Parents are encouraged to:

* Share information about their child that will help us to get to know them.
* Bring their child to the *service* for visits before they start fully.
* Tell their child when they are going to begin at the service. An infant can be told “……………….. will take care of you this morning.” A toddler can be encouraged to look forward to playing with other children a few days in advance and can then be reminded on the day itself.
* We ask that junior preschoolers in their first year of ECCE be collected at 12pm for the first two weeks to ease their settling in period.
* Develop a goodbye routine or ritual that they can use with their child each day such as giving the child a kiss or a big hug, waving good-bye from the door, or whatever they and their child feel comfortable doing. This way, both the parents and the child will know how to handle the parting.
* Talk with their child’s Key Person about bringing items from home that are important to their child, for example, a favourite soft toy or blanket, photos of family members, or a recording of themselves reading a favourite story or singing a familiar song.

#### On an ongoing basis parents/guardians will be encouraged to:

* Continue to spend time when they bring their child in the morning and when they return at the end of the day to talk with staff *[ideally their child’s Key Person]* about what happened that day and express any concerns.
* Be sure to say good-bye each day so their child knows that they can trust them and that they won't leave without warning.
* Collect their child on time every day so their child can be confident they won’t be left at the service when the other children have gone home.
* Keep their child’s Key Person up to date with relevant information on any big changes in the child’s home life or circumstances and small changes, such as when their child masters new skills or helps out with tasks and routines at home. Knowing this information, the educators can provide individualised support for the child where needed and recognise and build on the child's skills.

#### Staff members can:

* Welcome each child and their parents by name each morning.
* Help parents to recognise a child’s need to feel connected to their parents when they are apart.
* Help parents appreciate the importance of goodbye rituals
* Support both parents and child in their ritual for saying good-bye.
* Continue to make parents welcome.
* Give parents information about their child’s experiences each day and invite them to share information about their experiences with their child at home
* Display interesting items for people to talk about, such as photos of the previous day's/week’s experiences.
* Invite parents to bring special items from home that will help their child feel connected.
* Help the child express their feelings about their parents leaving. Talk with them about their home and family later in the day. Suggest that they call their parents on a real or toy telephone.
* Invite the child to paint, dance, sing or tell a story using toys as characters.
* Give the child opportunities to use the skills they know. Sharing tasks like preparing for meals or putting toys away can also reinforce their feelings of competence.
* Play games of hiding and reappearing.
* Read stories of good-byes and returns.

#### Routines and transitions within the daily programme of activities

* Children can attend to personal routines, such as going to the toilet, according to their individual body schedules.
* Children have easy access to their transitional objects when they want or need them and are given time and understanding to help them to become more able to manage longer periods without them.
* While balancing the range of activities (active/quiet, small group/large group/individual, indoors/outdoors), routines and transitions are kept to a minimum and managed consistently so that children can develop trust and a sense of security*.*
* Transitions within the daily routine, although managed consistently, are as flexible as possible to allow for children to follow their interests where possible.
* Transitions that must happen, involving moving from one type of activity to another, are planned so that children who are ready before others have something to do while they wait.
* Children are given advance notice visually *[for example with an interactive visual routine/schedules and or sand timers]* of changes to routines or planned changes within the schedule of activities that will affect them.
* It is considered important to recognise that some children need to be given more time, support and assistance to cope with changes in activity levels and/or types of activities, than others.
* If the furniture is going to be changed around or major changes made to the environment, this is discussed with the children and explained in advance so that they can be involved and understand why the change is happening.
* Children can participate in helping with routines as much as they are able (for example helping to set the table or cleaning up)

Transition to school

Throughout the years before children move to school they are supported to develop the skills and dispositions they will need to transition and settle in well to the school setting.

These skills and dispositions are developed through our quality curriculum, which is informed by Aistear the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. The curriculum we provide supports children’s learning and development under the themes of Wellbeing, Exploring and Thinking, Communication and Identity and Belonging. See The Willow Tree Children’s Centre’s Curriculum

**Planning transitions**

The following are some of the considerations in preparation for any upcoming transition:

Preparation

* What can be done early to begin preparing the child for this transition?
* What partnerships need to be formed to ensure continuity and ease the transition?
* What items/resources are available to help ease this child’s transition?

#### Environment/physical space

* Will the new/next setting be a different room at a different location? How is the child likely to react?
* What choices will the child be able to make?
* Will materials and equipment be very different or familiar to the child? How accessible will they be?

#### Routines

* What will daily activities be like, and how might the child react to these experiences?
* How are the routines going to be handled?
1. *Examples:*
2. *(1) Eating*
3. *(2) Napping*
4. *(3) Nappy changing/toileting*
5. *(4) Outdoor activities*
6. *(5) Indoor activities*
7. *(6) Tidy up time*

#### Staffing

* Will the child be assigned a new Key Person? If so, how might they react?
* How do the adults generally interact with the children?
* How do the adults relate to each other?

####  Social interactions

* What kinds of opportunities will the child have to interact with other children?
* Will any of the children be familiar to the child?
* What is the family’s role in this change?
* What are the opportunities for family interaction?

### Considering culture in transition practices

*Providing culturally competent care and education supports a developing child's sense of security, identity, competence, confidence, and connectedness. When staff members understand and honour family childrearing practices and preferences, they can provide infants and toddlers, in particular, with consistency and familiarity, which are especially important during transitions. It is, of course, always important to ensure that all practices are legal and are in the child’s best interests.*

#### As far as possible we will:

* Provide harmony with each child’s home culture, for example:
* Ensure that we use some of the child’s home language if it is not English and encourage parents to continue to use the child’s first language at home.
* Provide a culturally relevant environment that is familiar and homelike to the child where items familiar to the child are included.
* Understand and respect each family’s cultural beliefs and childrearing values (as long as these are in the child’s best interests).
* Provide consistency by understanding the home routines of each child.
* Discuss each family’s expectations for their child’s learning and development and the transition.

*[For example, ask if the family expects the child to develop independence skills and how the family expects the child to adjust to a new setting, new people or a new language.]*

* Be aware of our own cultural values, beliefs, and expectations. Acknowledge how these match or differ from the family’s expectations and consider differences or potential conflicts.

#### We encourage families to foster cultural consistency and continuity during transitions by:

* Sharing their cultural values and childrearing practices with staff *[ideally their child’s Key Person]* before and during their child’s transition and saying what they expect from the staff
* Communicating frequently with about their child’s routines, temperament, reactions, likes, dislikes, and ability to adapt to differences and change.
* Providing staff with ongoing feedback and discussing/negotiating differences.

### Checklist for exchanging information

#### Families are encouraged to share:

* Information about their child's temperament and dispositions.
* Information about what upsets their child and what comforts them.
* How their child reacts to strangers, familiar adults and other children.
* How they handle routines such as eating, toileting and sleeping.
* Relevant information about themselves and their culture.
* Information about their child's previous experiences.
* A brief developmental and medical history of their child – from birth to the present – that includes social, emotional, physical and language development information.
* How parents/guardians prefer to communicate different types of information (for example, in person, by telephone, by notice board or individually in writing).
* How they wish to be involved in the *service/programme*.
* How they would like to see the transition period happen.
* Their hopes for their child.

#### Staff members can share with families:

* How we support children to transition into the *service/programme*.
* Information about the programme’s composition, philosophy, schedules and activities (curriculum).
* How we generally communicate information to families.
* How families can get involved in the *service/programme*.
* How planning and individualised routines are handled.
* How we observe and report learning and developmental progress.
* How we handle transitions within the programme.
* How we help prepare for transitions out if the *service/programme.*

### Guidance on saying good-bye and moving on

Relationships are very important to children. Although children may not always express or understand their feelings, these feelings do exist and are sometimes expressed in ways that make it difficult for parents and other adults to deal with them. The following suggestions can help children accept changes and deal with them in appropriate ways.

* Prepare the child by giving them some notice when a relationship is about to change. (For example, tell them, *“Sam is going to be moving soon, and he won't be able to come and play every day”).*
* Help the child understand their feelings by using words like lonely, worried, sad or unhappy to describe how they might be feeling if they are showing signs of such feelings.
* Put things in perspective (For example, *“We won’t see Ava as much now but you will still have Sophie and Joe to play with”*).
* Help the child express the meaning of the relationship by encouraging them to make a card, draw a picture or make a small gift. Let them know that relationships are very important by creating an opportunity to express affection and validate their feelings.
* Focus on the positives associated with change. When people grow and move forward, there will always be changes in relationships. New teachers, new friends, and changes in activities are part of life.
* Share with the child some of your own experiences in leaving valued relationships. Tell them how you felt at that time.
* Create a memento. Children are concrete thinkers and having a physical reminder reassures them that the relationship was shared and is an important part of their lives.

**Communication of Policy**

All parents/guardians are to be informed of this policy. Staff members will check with parents/guardians that they have read and understood the policy and provide any assistance needed.

A summary of this policy will be included in the Parent/Guardian Handbook and the full policy is available on the website www.blennerville.playschool.com

This policy will also be reviewed with staff at induction and annual staff training.

A copy of all policies will be available during all hours of operation to staff members and parents/guardians upon request.

Parents/guardians may receive a copy of the policy at any time upon request.

Parents/guardians and the staff team will receive written notification of any updates.

This policy is underwritten by the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 and the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Registration of Pre-school and school-age Services) Regulations 2018.

This policy was reviewed and adopted by The Willow Tree Children’s Centre on 1st January 2024.

Signed by: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

On behalf of Management

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