Settling-in programme

Our settling-in programme is based on the Berlin settling-in model, which provides for a gentle and gradual transition. This settling-in process, which involves parental support, focuses on attachment and takes goodbyes into account, is therefore a vital foundation for providing the best possible care at the nursery.

A major process of separation takes place between parents and child, the significance of which should not be underestimated. The child may experience fears and insecurities that must be taken seriously and addressed with respect and the necessary care. The separation should be experienced as something temporary and not as a threat.

For carers, the first contact with the child is crucial. The aim is to build a good relationship with the child. This is an important prerequisite for a child to feel comfortable approaching a carer and accepting them as a primary caregiver.

It is very important that parents prepare their child for their first day at nursery at home in a way that is appropriate for their age. The child should know whether they will be leaving the nursery with their parents or staying there on their own.
One parent must be contactable by telephone at all times during and after the settling-in period.

The settling-in period is divided into various stages:

Basic phase

The parents' meeting takes place on the first day. During this meeting, the parents and the caregiver get to know one another. Information about the child and the daily routine is shared. The caregiver is also the point of contact for any concerns or questions the parents may have.

During the first few days, the child attends the nursery accompanied by a parent. These visits usually take place in the morning and last approximately 1.5 to 2 hours (between 9.30 am and 11.30 am). The parent or another trusted person accompanies the child to the nursery and stays with them in the group room, remaining passive but attentive to the child's cues. They remain the child's 'safe haven', i.e. they do not follow the child around, but are always easily accessible and attentive. The parent takes care of the child's personal hygiene. The primary caregiver gently tries to establish contact with the child through play activities. The aim of the initial phase is to get to know the child and take the first step towards building a relationship of trust.

The attempt to separate

On approximately the fourth day, the parent leaves the group room after saying goodbye to the child. If the child is quickly comforted by their primary carer or seems rather indifferent, the first separation may last up to 30 minutes. If, on the other hand, the child seems distressed or starts crying without being easily comforted, the separation should not last longer than two to three minutes.

Personal care tasks such as nappy changing and feeding can now be taken over by the primary carer in stages.

A provisional decision on the length of the settling-in period

The caregiver observes the child's behaviour towards their mother or father whilst the parent is leaving and upon their return. The observations made during the initial phase are also taken into account when deciding to what extent the child genuinely needs the parent's presence beyond the six-day period.

Frequent eye contact with the parent, open and uninhibited approaches – including physical contact – during the first three days and when the parent returns following the first separation suggest that a longer settling-in period of two to three weeks is necessary.

If the child tries to cope with the stressful situation on their own and hardly turns to the accompanying parent (little to no eye contact or physical contact), a shorter settling-in period may also be arranged. Such a decision is important because unnecessarily prolonged parental involvement can do more harm than good to some children.

The stabilisation phase

The stabilisation phase begins on the fifth day, or on the sixth if the fifth day is a Monday. The primary carer gradually takes on more responsibility for the child's care (changing nappies, feeding, etc.). The periods of separation are extended daily in line with the child's needs. If the child has not yet come to terms with the separation, a further separation should not be attempted until the second week. Where possible, a new stage should never be started on a Monday.

The first time a child sleeps at the nursery, they are accompanied by their primary caregiver. When the child wakes up, the primary caregiver should greet her/him.

The final stages

The child is now getting used to the daily routine at the nursery. They are now familiar with their caregiver, the other staff members and their playmates. It is quite possible that the child may protest when their parents leave. They are perfectly entitled to do so. What matters is whether the caregiver can quickly comfort them once their parents have gone and whether the child is then keen to take part in the nursery's daily routine in good spirits.

Even under the most favourable conditions during the settling-in period, it is important to bear in mind that the child will be very tired at first after attending the nursery. The caregiver will point this out to the parents. Where possible, a shorter session at the nursery (e.g. 9.00 am–4.30 pm) is recommended.

We consider the final phase to be complete once the child has formed a bond with their primary caregiver and feels safe and secure with us. If the child has not yet felt secure after three to four weeks, we work with the parents to find solutions.