



# Everything You Need To Know About Transitioning From Early Years To Reception

Transitioning from an early years setting to Reception class is one of the most important milestones in a child's educational journey. It marks the move from a predominantly play-based, flexible environment to a more structured school setting. For many children, this will be their first experience of formal education. For practitioners, supporting this transition effectively is a vital part of helping children feel secure, confident and ready to learn.

Here, we explore everything early years practitioners need to know about preparing children and families for this change, focusing on practical strategies, inclusive approaches, and the latest research in early childhood development.

## Why transition matters

Transitions can be a source of stress and uncertainty for young children. Research by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) indicates that smooth transitions are associated with improved emotional well-being and academic outcomes in the early years. A well-supported transition can build resilience, encourage a love of learning, and help children settle more quickly into their new environment.



## Defining 'school readiness' - a shifting landscape

The concept of 'school readiness' is often used as a benchmark in early childhood education – yet it remains one of the most debated and difficult-to-define ideas in the sector. For some, school readiness means a child can sit still, follow instructions, and hold a pencil correctly. For others, it's about emotional security, curiosity, and confidence to engage in a new learning environment.

*Current government definitions tend to lean toward a set of developmental expectations that align with the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) in the EYFS framework. These are assessed through the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) – a statutory one-to-one task-based check of early literacy, communication and maths skills conducted in the first six weeks of school.*

While this gives schools a starting point for measuring progress, many practitioners question whether this approach offers a holistic view of a child's true readiness. The RBA does not currently assess personal, social and emotional development – a vital area when it comes to settling and thriving in Reception.

In addition, the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) is the final statutory assessment in the EYFS, completed at the end of the Reception year, typically in the summer term when the child is 5. This assesses each child against the 17 Early Learning Goals (ELGs) and helps inform the transition to Year 1. So 'school readiness' could mean different things, either going into Reception from nursery school, or leaving the early years and going into Year 1.

There is a growing call within the sector for a broader, more flexible definition and more clarity about when it should be applied.

Leading organisations, such as Early Education and PACEY, also argue that school readiness should be seen as a two-way process: not just preparing the child for school, but also preparing the school to receive the child. This includes adapting the classroom environment, supporting well-being, and continuing play-based approaches during the early weeks of Reception.

A 2022 report by the British Association for Early Childhood Education notes that school readiness should never become a narrow checklist of academic tasks. Instead, it should focus on the whole child, including their confidence, communication, independence and resilience.

*As transition planning continues to evolve, the definition of school readiness must remain open to professional interpretation, cultural context, and the individual strengths each child brings with them. Recognising that children develop at different paces, and that 'readiness' is not a fixed state, is key to supporting a truly inclusive and child-centred transition.*

## Preparing children for Reception

As we've seen, preparing children for Reception should be done with a holistic approach; however, within that, there are several areas which you can consider when working with children, their families and the new school. You may typically begin preparing your children for the transition to Reception during the summer term before they start school, although you may lay the groundwork earlier in their final year through play-based learning, social stories and social development.

**Remember, transition is a process, not a one-day event!**

Here are some things to consider:

### 1. Build familiarity with school routines

- Talk about what school is like through circle time stories or role play
- Introduce classroom-style routines such as self-registration, lining up, and tidying up
- Create opportunities to practise skills like putting on shoes, using lunch boxes, and managing coats and bags independently

### 2. Use visual aids and storytelling

- Read picture books about starting school to spark discussion
- Talk about what the characters found easy or more challenging
- Create a personalised photo book or visual timeline showing their new school
- Help children create a scrapbook to take to school, with photos of their keyworker, friends, favourite activities, and drawings of their setting



### 3. Encourage emotional literacy

- Help children express their feelings about the move using puppets or drawing activities
- Talk about change and reassure children in an age-appropriate way

### 4. Support peer relationships

- Arrange play sessions with other children who will be attending the same school
- Encourage cooperative games and buddy systems
- Allow children to attend induction or pre-September sessions such as 'Move Up Day'

## Insights from research

Evidence-based education research has long supported educational practitioners to make policy decisions based on best practice, and transitions have had their fair share of research attention.



A 2023 report by the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) found that:

- Children who had opportunities to revisit school spaces before the first day were 37% more likely to settle quickly
- The use of consistent emotional coaching (naming feelings, co-regulation strategies) in early years settings directly impacted how well children adapted to Reception
- Parents who had at least one dedicated transition meeting felt 60% more prepared than those who received only written materials

The report encourages a whole-community approach, where schools, settings and families all see transition as a collaborative process.

Recent research from the Anna Freud Centre (2022) and the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) suggests that transitions should be approached as a gradual process, not a one-off event. Key findings include:

- Relationships are central to positive transitions. Strong bonds with key workers and early connections with school staff make a significant difference
- Transitions are easier when children understand why the change is happening and feel in control of parts of the process
- Practitioners who feel confident in supporting transitions are more likely to take proactive, flexible approaches

*Embedding transition into everyday practice, rather than treating it as an end-of-year add-on, allows children to develop readiness at their own pace.*

## Building links

Both early years settings and schools benefit from strong communication and creating strong links between them. This encourages better support, shared expectations, smoother handovers, and more consistent strategies, which will benefit the children and their families. This can include:

- Scheduling professional meet-ups: Encourage Reception and nursery staff to meet regularly, either in person or online
- Sharing approaches to routines and behaviour

- Comparing expectations and strategies around things like snack time, turn-taking, and managing emotions, as well as the consistency of information
- Using consistent language with an agreed vocabulary, such as names for learning areas, calming techniques, or reward systems



## Supporting families with transition

We all know that children do best when there is an effective working partnership between home and our settings. When children are transitioning up to Reception, then it is more important than ever that the communication is open, and in this case, it should be a three-way conversation, since you will be expecting the new school to be liaising with families and carers too. When everyone is on the same page, the transition becomes much easier for children and families alike, so make sure you are using some of the best practice ideas below when it comes to supporting families:

### 1. Communicate early and often

- Provide a clear timeline of the transition process and key dates
- Share information about school expectations and routines
- Offer drop-in sessions or informal chats to address any parental concerns

## 2. Set up parent/carers information sessions

- Invite local Reception teachers to attend and answer questions
- Discuss how the EYFS framework continues into the Reception year and have open discussions about 'school readiness', acknowledging the ongoing debate

## 3. Encourage at-home preparation

- Suggest fun activities parents can do at home to build independence (e.g., dressing, toileting, eating)
- Share book lists and story ideas to support the emotional aspect of starting school and suggest that parents take some time to practice the route to the new school before September, so this is not a new journey for the children

## 4. Acknowledge family emotions

- Reassure families and carers that it's normal to feel nervous and have mixed emotions when children transition from one setting to another educational establishment. This will be the first of many during the child's educational journey, but each brings their own set of memories, expectations and anxieties that need to be acknowledged
- Share your confidence in their child's readiness and celebrate the progress the child is making along the way

## Planning effective transition activities

Helping children practically with their transition to Reception is part of the job for all early years practitioners, as it is for Reception teachers who help children settle into their class. There are several ways that you can practically help, including:

### 1. Organise move-up or taster days

- Arrange visits to local schools so children can meet staff and explore the classroom. This is sometimes done on a county-wide basis so that all children in education can experience a day in their new school at the same time (e.g. Year 6 transitioning up to secondary schools, Year 11s going to college or 6<sup>th</sup> form)
- Coordinate with Reception teachers to allow shared sessions or story times. Remember there may be several nurseries that the Reception teacher has to visit so allow plenty of time to plan and accommodate this



## 2. Share transition reports and learning journeys

- Provide key information about each child's development, interests and support needs. This is especially important for children with SEND who may need an individual plan devising for them
- Use a consistent format that aligns with Reception teachers' expectations, and check the transfer of any safeguarding files to make sure they are securely delivered, received and deleted as necessary

## 3. Develop joint activities between settings and schools

- Collaborate on joint creative projects, garden planting, or art displays, which may already have been part of your provision during the year so that the progression from nursery to the school feels natural for the children
- Use transition teddy bears or mascots that travel between settings to help and give the children a 'champion' to focus on

## 4. Suggest holiday bridging activities

- Create simple activity packs or summer journals that children can work on at home and then take to their new school in the new term
- Encourage parents to keep up routines like bedtime stories, chatting about the school day, and naming emotions throughout the summer so that it remains on the children's radar





## Additional considerations for children with SEND

Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) may require additional planning and support during times of transition.

### 1. Early planning and communication

- Begin discussions with families and schools well in advance (at least a term before)
- Hold transition review meetings involving SENCOs from both the early years setting and the receiving school

### 2. Personalised transition plans

- Create individual plans tailored to the child's needs, with input from parents and external specialists if needed
- Include strategies for communication, sensory needs, and how best to deal with changes in routine

### 3. Use visual supports and social stories

- Offer child-friendly guides to new settings using photos, symbols and simple language – this is most likely done in collaboration with the new school who will need to contact the families/carers to ensure a smooth transition
- Practise new routines well in advance and offer repeat visits where possible

### 4. Ensure continuity of support

- Share details of any strategies, interventions or tools that have worked well including any ongoing help or interventions that the child has been receiving
- Ensure key professionals such as therapists or one-to-one support staff are included in planning and delivery of advice

### 5. Empower and support families

- Offer regular updates and opportunities for families and children to ask questions
- Connect your families with school-based SEND support teams or parent forums if this is not already being done by the new school



## Summer transitions and holiday support for families

The summer holidays can feel long and uncertain for both children and families preparing for Reception. It's important to continue the transition journey informally during this time. You can do this by:

- Providing parents with simple, printable summer activities that mirror school routines – e.g., morning checklists, lunchbox practice, or storytime diaries
- Encouraging continued visits past the end of term, where schools permit, especially for children with additional needs
- Suggesting community events, library reading challenges, or museum days to maintain engagement and routine
- Recording short goodbye videos or memory books from keyworkers to keep children feeling connected
- Reinforcing the message to families that 'everyday moments' – like chatting, tidying, or sharing meals – all support school readiness

As the NSPCC and PACEY have both noted in recent publications, parental confidence is one of the strongest indicators of a successful school start.

## Common pitfalls to avoid

Even with the best intentions, some aspects of transition can be overlooked. Here are a few common pitfalls to be mindful of:

- Last-minute planning: Transitions should begin early, ideally during the spring term, not just in the final weeks of summer
- Lack of SEND planning: Children with additional needs may require longer transitions or more visits
- Overwhelming children with too much information: Keep communication clear and age-appropriate
- Not involving the child's voice: Let children express their thoughts and feelings about the move
- Treating all children the same: Each child's journey is unique. Transition support should reflect individual needs

In conclusion, transitioning from early years settings to Reception is a big step – not just for children, but for families, practitioners and school staff too. With planning, communication and care, you can turn this transition into a joyful and positive milestone. It's about more than just preparing children for school – it's about honouring the child's whole journey so far, and helping them take their next steps with confidence, curiosity and security.

By embedding transition support across your setting and working in partnership with families and schools, you're laying the foundation for happy, successful learners – ready to thrive from day one.

## References and more information

- [Education Endowment Foundation \(EEF\) – Early Years Toolkit](#)
- [Anna Freud Centre \(2022\)](#)
- [EYFS Statutory Framework \(2024 update\)](#)
- [Transitions – Birth To 5 Matters](#)
- [Early Years Transition Webcasts | Nasen](#)
- [ECTA Center: Early Intervention Services: Key Principles and Practices](#)
- [Starting School - Why consulting with children is fundamental to creating effective transition practices in the EYFS. — CREC](#)
- [Being school-ready - PACEY](#)

# Parenta Solutions



## SOFTWARE

### NURSERY MANAGEMENT - ABACUS

- Save hours by reducing planning time by 50%
- Speedy invoicing to all parents and carers in minutes
- Instant view of all financial reports
- Manage payments and track debt

### EYFS LEARNING JOURNEY TRACKER - FOOTSTEPS 2

- Record meaningful and detailed EYFS observations
- Improve essential safeguarding and save hours of time
- Reduce your workload and spend more time with the children
- Identify at a glance each child's development pathway

### ONLINE DAILY DIARY - DAYSHARE

- Share every magical moment of each child's day with their parents and carers with our online diary software

### PARENT PORTAL APP

- Bringing parents and carers closer to their child's day by providing a timeline of their progress
- Download Parent Portal App on Android or iOS



## ONLINE CPD COURSES

No deadlines, no time restrictions, no classroom! Support your staff or further your professional development with our online CPD accredited courses



## TRAINING

Increase employee motivation and keep staff for longer within your setting by offering training - the ideal tool for you to develop your team.

Parenta courses include:

- Level 2 Early Years Practitioner
- Level 3 Early Years Educator
- Level 5 Early Years Lead Practitioner

PLUS ... Parenta offers a free recruitment service - no fees!



## MARKETING SOLUTIONS

### WEBSITE DESIGN

- Our childcare websites generate genuine interest and leads from parents and carers
- We specialise in designing and building childcare websites so you can rest assured that our team know what Ofsted and parents/carers are looking for

### BRANDING & DESIGN

- Showcase your setting with branded products. From newsletters to logos and prospectuses to business cards, we take care of all your branding needs

### SOCIAL MEDIA

- We assist you with setting up and using your social media accounts in no time to help you increase your setting's visibility

## Working together for our children



0800 002 9242



[hello@parenta.com](mailto:hello@parenta.com)

Follow us on social media @TheParentaGroup



[www.parenta.com](http://www.parenta.com)

Parenta, Stratford House, Waterside Court, Neptune Way, Medway City Estate, Rochester, Kent, ME2 4NZ