



Every Child a Talker

Supporting wellbeing: beginning and ending your session

How we start and end our morning or day has an important influence on children's wellbeing and communication. These are times when parents and children are most vulnerable. How parents and children separate first thing in the morning will have a significant impact on the confidence of the adults, and on the children's wellbeing. If both parties are happy and positive about saying goodbye to each other, and are clear about what will happen during the session, then the children will be able to relax and learn.

How children and parents meet each other at the end of the day will also influence what happens the next day. If there is a happy chat about what the child has been doing, then parents and children can both look forward to tomorrow.

However, dropping off and picking up times can sometimes be very fraught, for parents, children and practitioners. How can we make this successful for all involved? A well-organised start to the morning, and end to the day, with clear routines, can provide children and parents with boundaries, as well as being an important learning experience.

Self Registration

Allowing parents to help their children to show that they are in the building (self registration) can provide a great start to the session. There are lots of ways that settings self-register. Here are some examples:

- The setting doesn't have an official 'answering the register' time. An adult is allotted to 'meet and greet' children and parents, and help the children register themselves. This is a great opportunity to find out how children are feeling, to make them feel welcome, and help them to settle. There is an easel for children to mark themselves in, in any way they choose: be it by writing their name, drawing a picture of themselves or making a mark. The adult who meets and greets is responsible for keeping the official record.
- The children each have an A5 sized laminated card with their photo on. Their name is attached with Velcro. There is Velcro on the back of the photo card. The cards are laid out on a table before the session starts. As parents and children come in, they help their children to find their card and stick it on a large screen. The screen has a sign on it saying, "Who's in Pre-school today?" A practitioner helps with the process and chats with the children and parents. The photo cards are also used for name recognition games (many children in settings don't know each other's names) and older children can match written names to photos.

Many settings encourage the children to go and choose an activity as soon as they come in, rather than get together in a large group immediately. This can be very helpful for children who are finding it difficult to settle, as their parents can stay with them and play. After about 30 minutes of free play the children get together in a group and sing a 'hello song' and chat about what might happen in the setting.

Some settings have a ritual of getting all the children together to talk about the weather, the day of the week, the date and the month. This is often irrelevant to only the most able. Some practitioners justify this by saying that all children need to learn to sit in a large group, because this is what they will experience at school, (even though they admit that it is not appropriate in school either!) The time could be better spent briefly singing songs or sharing a topic of genuine interest.

The end of the session is also a crucial time for developing children's confidence, wellbeing and language. Some children and parents can become very stressed at this time. Children can be tired, or it can occasionally be a flashpoint for attention-seeking behaviour. Some parents also need support and boundaries at this time, and practitioners need to find a balance between being welcoming and encouraging parents to take their children home.

Having a goodbye ritual can be an important way of defining boundaries and learning at the same time. Here's an example, from the same setting that has the photo and name cards for self-registration:

At the end of the session the children sit together on mats. There is enough space for all the children to sit comfortably together. All the adults sit with the children, apart from two who are available to welcome the parents in. The children sing a 'goodbye' song, and as the parents come to the door the practitioners sing 'goodbye' to the child whose parents have arrived. Parents help their children get their coats etc, take their photo card off the screen and put it in the 'Goodbye box'. This is a very natural way to end the session, as it gives children and adults a clear idea of what they should do. It can be a great support to parents who find it a challenge to get their children to cooperate with leaving the premises! Parents who want to stay behind and talk to a member of staff can do so, while others can leave promptly with their children, or chat with each other outside.

Whatever we do at the beginning and end of the session, parents and children need to have the routine explained to them, and especially *why* you do it that way. If it is explained from the children's point of view; i.e. it helps the children to be secure, happy and learn, then most parents will be happy to comply.

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