



Attachment and the role of the key person

What is a key person? The main key points are;

- The key person helps the child to feel known, understood, cared about, and safe.
- The key person role involves a triangle of trust with the child and family.
- An effective key person approach needs strong leadership and committed practice.
- Children benefit most when their key person has special qualities and dispositions.

Babies and children become attached to significant adults within reliable, respectful, warm and loving relationships which are essential in order to thrive. Babies and children experience wellbeing and contentment when their physical and emotional needs are met and their feelings are accepted. The key person approach, reflecting relationships within families, helps serve to meet these conditions. Early experiences of love and attachment have lifelong benefits.

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At Little stars we believe a key person;

- has passion for their work and sees the value and rewards in being a key person
- is empathic and understands the different ways of creating a family
- appreciates and respects the cultures, identities and diverse backgrounds of the children and families with whom they work
- is able to draw on their own informal knowledge of childcare practice from within their own experience and reflect on how best to use or build on it
- is able to reflect on and understand the influence of their own attachment experiences on their work with children and families, with the confidence to know when to ask for support and further training
- is willing to research and reflect on the concept of "professional love", so that they can see its relevance to their work as a key person
- finds effective ways to connect with families, such as developing digital technologies while continuing with as many opportunities for face-to-face connection as possible
- is not judgemental and has the skills to communicate with other agencies and settings involved with the child and their family
- is well qualified, and/or has wider knowledge and understanding of, for example:
 - child development

- attachment theory, including social and biological factors that might affect a child's capacity to form attachments
 - co-regulation and self-regulation
 - neuroscience (brain development and how it links with all the Prime areas as well as self-regulation and executive function)
 - pedagogy of effective, relation-based practice
 - bias and prejudice, how it affects the children and families they work with as well as themselves, and strategies to challenge this
 - how to identify and support children in a range of circumstances, including those who are vulnerable, looked after, with visible and invisible special educational needs and disabilities
- recognises that it is a personal as well as a professional relationship which brings with it much joy, as well as challenge.
 - works collaboratively with other practitioners, to ensure consistency for the child, and supports transition as an ongoing process, not just an event.

The Birth to 5 Curriculum outlines detailed information about the role of the key person. Please feel free to read below and ask any questions!

The Role of the Key Person

The key person helps the child to feel known, understood, cared about, and safe. The key person helps the baby or child feel confident that they are "held in mind", thought about and loved. This experience of being cared for by reliable adults who meet their physical needs and remain attentive and playful, affectionate and thoughtful allows children to form secure attachments. Such a grounding provides a "secure base" from which children feel confident to explore the world and form other relationships.

The key person role involves a "triangle of trust" with the child and family. A key person approach is a way to ensure that all children and families have one or more persons within the setting with whom they have a special, nurturing relationship. The presence of a key person helps the child to feel emotionally secure when away from home and provides a reassuring point of contact for parents. There are different ways to ensure a key person is always available (e.g. shared and paired caring, or support partner or buddy).

A key person has special responsibilities for supporting a specific group of children and building relationships with them and their families. The role will involve close physical and personal care for a baby or young child. It is therefore important that parents feel able to share vital information about their child's intimate care preferences, likes and dislikes, motivations and interests, and how they feel about being away from home. Parents might want to talk about their child's feelings or development.

The key person's role includes, but goes far beyond, administrative and operational activities such as keeping records or communicating about the child with parents or other professionals. It is an emotional, reciprocal relationship. As children grow, the key person may not always be present at the

setting. Despite this, the child should still feel “held in mind” when they are apart. The key person approach is statutory throughout the early years phase, including in Reception. The role may look very different in a large class of children with often only two adults, but the principles remain the same. A teacher can retain overall knowledge of the children in their class and benefit from particular knowledge that other people working with them might have. The stronger the relationships are, the more supported the child (and their family) will feel about subsequent transitions, including to Key Stage 1.

An effective key person approach needs strong leadership and committed practice. Leaders should have a good working knowledge of the key person approach and be able to implement it to maximise consistency and continuity for the child and family, while offering the best possible support and supervision for practitioners. Although there is legally no minimum qualification to be a key person, leaders can support less experienced staff, including careful thought about the pairing (or mentoring) so that all can benefit from wide expertise. Key persons communicate with a wide range of people involved with the child, including those in other settings the child attends, health visitors, paediatricians, Portage, physiotherapists, social services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, bilingual support, children's centres, and others such as dinner staff.

The role of the key person involves building a relationship of “professional love”, with specific and potentially heavy demands. It is important to have professional support and supervision in order to share the challenges of the role. It is also a joyful and privileged position to share in the care of a baby or young child, so having opportunities to celebrate and share those joys are equally important.