

# ST MARY'S

calling Islington home

## **Settling in at the Pre-school**

### **Policy and procedures for parents and for staff working with children**

**Last reviewed and approved by Trustees**

St Mary Islington  
St Mary's Parish Office  
Upper Street  
Islington  
N1 2TX  
[stmaryislington.org.uk](http://stmaryislington.org.uk)

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## **1 Why we have this policy**

St Mary's Pre-school aims to support children's care and welfare on a daily basis in line with their individual needs. The first weeks when a child is settling in the Pre-school are of crucial importance to their later happiness in the setting. Extra care taken before and during this period will minimise difficulties later on.

## **2 The parents' role**

It is important for both you and your child that you feel confident about your child being cared for in the setting. Children are very sensitive to their parents' feelings, so any uncertainties you feel will be noticed by your child and will make it more difficult for you to leave them happily. Part of building up confidence in the setting is getting to know the staff so that you can show your child that you are friendly with them and trust them to look after your child. Feel free to ask lots of questions to familiarise yourself with our routines and do let us know of any concerns or worries you might have.

It is good preparation, both for you and your child, if you can visit the setting together before you start settling them in. You could combine these visits with a visit to your usual place of work so that they have some idea of where your workplace is in relation to the Pre-school.

You may wish to mention to your immediate line manager at work, if this is relevant, that you will be settling your child in at the Pre-school since you may need a little extra flexibility in working hours when you respond to your child's needs. You can explain that settling a child carefully will minimise calls on your time later on.

The settling in period is a gradual introduction of your child to the setting, the other children, the activities, the daily programme and the staff. It is also a gradual withdrawal of your presence so these two aspects have to be carefully and sensitively balanced. At first, the Pre-school is bound to be rather an overwhelming experience, particularly for children under 3yrs and for those who have not had experience of a playgroup, childminder, or some other form of care outside the home. First children and those from a small family may find settling in a bit more difficult. Your child's personality will certainly make a difference; some take to the change very easily, whilst others need more care and time.

Before your child starts at the setting we will contact you and arrange for a home visit. This is so you and your child are able to meet the key person who will be your child's main carer. (refer to key person policy) The home visit gives your child the opportunity to get to know us in their own space so we as staff do not appear as strangers when it is time for them to start pre-school. You can do some preparation by talking to them about how the staff will care for them and about some of the activities which they may particularly look forward to. It may also be helpful if they can join in preparing 'things to bring', such as a labelled lunch

box/piece of fruit, hats and gloves etc. You may like to read with them children's books that are available which describe going to a nursery in children's terms.

At first, your child is going to need your support and presence to be able to cope with the new experience. This is why your first visit should be short and you should not try to leave your child at all. However, you can use these visits constructively by talking with the staff and other children and perhaps drawing your child into whatever activity is going on. It is worth stressing again that they will be particularly sensitive to how you relate to the staff; after all, you will be handing over to them before long and your child must feel that you get on well.

#### **Additional information from parents**

A profile of your child will be done on the day of the home visit, so please do mention to the staff early on anything that may make it easier for them to respond to your child's special needs. For example, is there anything your child particularly likes or dislikes, are there any 'family words' for particular things, does your child have a special comforter and so on. Mention anything you feel may be relevant. There is no reason why your child shouldn't be with you when you do this; it will help them to see that you are concerned that they are well looked after.

**Please remember that, when visiting the setting, your child will look to you for care and control and staff will only intervene where accepted safety rules are being challenged. Also note that any other children you bring with you will be considered to be under your control.**

### **3 How we promote settling in**

Whilst our first aim is to be flexible and responsive towards each situation, there are some key points to note as part of the settling in process.

- For the child's first session, it is recommended that the parent/carer stay as this helps the child to get to know the staff, the environment and the daily routines
- At the home visit if possible we will take a photo of you and your child as a family and place this within the pre-school on the family board so your child can see you throughout their session. If we are unable to take a photo we will ask you to email one in before starting.
- We will ensure your child's name peg/individual draw etc are done ready for your child to have places for their belongings.
- After the first session, parents/carers are expected to spend time in the Pre-school with their child. Parents will be encouraged to sit at the side so children can move around freely but will know that a secure person is still within reach. This is dependent on the needs of the child and the parent/carer
- Once a child is familiar with the Pre-school setting, the parent/carer will leave the child

for an agreed period of time. Children are always told when a parent/carer is leaving and the parent/carer must always say goodbye

- When a child feels comfortable about being left for a full session, the parent/carer can leave but should provide means of contact
- If your child is full time, please expect your child only to attend the setting for half a day for the first week. A gradual programme dependent on your child will help them through lunch time
- Parents should always try to bring their children to the Pre-school on time (9am or 1pm). If, by registration time (9.15am/1.15pm), the child has settled into an activity or game, the rest of the morning or afternoon can then unfold routinely, creating stability for the whole group
- Similarly, it is just as important to collect a child on time (12pm/4pm), as being 'left behind', even for a few minutes, is an unsettling experience
- If a parent/carer is delayed either at the beginning or the end of the day, please telephone the Pre-school and inform us as soon as possible. The telephone number is 020 7704 2873
- If your child is attached to a specific object, such as a dummy, a doll, a blanket, please bring it along. If the item is one of a kind, please make sure you arrive a few minutes earlier to collect your child in order to allow time to find it. Please also label it
- If your child is not attached to a specific object, you may choose to bring an object from home which the child will recognise, to ease anxiety for the first few days. You may bring a book, small photo album, daddy's hat, a doll with mummy's perfume etc...anything that will enhance the child's sense of belonging and security. If you like, you can use the act of bringing in fruit every day as a great tool to link home and Pre-school
- To the children, we adults look like giants. This can affect the children who are trying to settle in the new environment, so please try to sit down rather than standing over them and be as quiet and unobtrusive as you can. Staff will support you by providing you with a comfortable area to sit within the room
- Think about the best separation sentence, such as *'Mummy/Daddy will be leaving and will come back very soon.'* Often, while under a lot of pressure, we tend to ask our children questions, such as *'Can Mummy go now, ok?'*, *'Mummy must leave. Can't you see you're the only one crying?'* and *'Daddy is leaving now, so say goodbye like a big girl/boy.'* These sentences create confusion and a big decision for the child to make. It is the child's right to be sad and s/he is not in a position to approve your leaving
- Remember, once you have acquainted yourselves with the setting (and the staff) and you feel your child is ready to be left for a while, first mention this to the staff so they can be ready to provide any extra help that is needed. It is normally best to be open and straightforward with your child about leaving them. Slipping away when they are not looking can be very distressing to a child when they find out you have gone. For the first time, you are only going to be away a short while, so tell your child and the member of staff, then leave without hesitating. It is much harder for a child to deal with your leaving if you are obviously unsure and hovering. It may help if you give the child a minute or two's notice that you are leaving, so they can begin to get used to the idea
- Some tears may result, but usually these are very short-lived and stop as soon as you are

out of sight. When you think about it, tears are a good sign and show how much you mean to your child. You will probably feel a bit wretched, too, at leaving them. You can give us a call or whatsapp us on our mobile number: **07935399872**

- After your child's first short spell without you in the setting, you will be able to discuss with the staff how to proceed with settling in, which is a gradual extension of your time away up to the full period your child will be spending in the Pre-school. Staff will base their advice on how your child responds to your absence
- Virtually all children will settle in if this guidance is followed and, even if there are setbacks, your child is gradually getting used to what is a major change in his/her life. You will probably find that your child reacts in some way; they may be more clingy than usual or they may be more rejecting. Both are normal reactions and a little extra attention and love will help them to cope with these feelings
- If, for some good reason, it is impossible for you to spend time settling in your child, you should arrange for a relation or friend who is well-known and liked by your child to do so. Parents are welcome in the setting and many visit on a regular basis during their lunch hour when their work commitments allow. Try not to hover around at the setting once you have collected your child so they understand the message that, once they are collected, they are taken home

### **Important**

**You will be expected to stay for longer if your child needs this. Staff will support and guide you as every child is different.**