

Tales from The Totem Pole: 4-5-years



It is only a few months until it is time for Joseph to start school. As a summer-born child in an LEA where children routinely start school in the September following their fourth birthday, he will be leaving the nursery, where he has been since he was six weeks-old, aged just 48 months! His key worker, Sharon, feels that he is too young to begin full time formal education; he still frequently falls asleep after lunch, for example, and finds sitting still difficult.

She is pleased, however, that his parents have chosen to send him to school with which the nursery has a strong relationship. The Reception teacher, Jean, visits the nursery at least once a term to tell stories to the children. She usually brings a small group of older children from school, who stay for a while to play simple games, based on the story with the children. Joseph and the other children look forward to the 'big kids' coming to visit, and the older children in turn develop confidence and social skills. Sharon and Jean also use these visits as an opportunity to share songs and routines so that there are many similarities between the two settings, which helps to make the transition as smooth as possible.

LITTLE POINTER: Releasing staff to visit schools and nurseries may seem costly, but it pays dividends when it comes to building relationships and ensuring smooth transitions.

Joseph likes to look at the display about school that Sharon has made with photographs of staff and places in school, items of uniform and a collection of lunch boxes. Joseph is quiet and thoughtful as he looks at the pictures, but later when Sharon helps him and his friend Andy try on school jumpers she is surprised that as they look at each other, and at themselves, in the mirror they shriek with laughter!

In the term before starting school the children and their families are invited to spend

Mary Barlow looks at an important transition in the life of a four-year-old child; how ideally it is a process which takes place over many months rather than a few short weeks at the end of the summer term...



some sessions in the Reception classroom. The school lets Sharon know when these sessions will be; she tries to go to at least one. Not only do the children obviously benefit from a familiar adult, Jean confides that she values Sharon's presence too because she knows the children so well and is consequently able to support Jean to ensure the children settle in as happily as possible. For example, she is able to tell her about Joseph's frequent after-dinner naps.

LITTLE POINTER: Valuable as profiles and other written records are, there is nothing like being able to speak first-hand to a professional who knows the child well.

Once Joseph starts school Sharon makes a point of visiting his new class as soon as possible. Joseph is very excited to see her and to show her his new school uniform. Although her visit was made with the aim of helping the children's transition, Sharon feels that it helps her too, as she is reassured to see that his needs are catered for in school. She joins in with a short, lively phonics lesson and notices that Joseph is not asked to sit still for very long at all. Jean also shows her the quiet corner with comfy chairs, books, blankets and cushions where Joseph can

settle for a rest, or even a nap, when he needs one.

LITTLE POINTER: The most important part of this successful transition process is the strong and respectful relationship between Jean and Sharon; so often professionals feel slightly awkward with each other when they visit each other's settings. By going out of our way to welcome other professionals, however unfriendly they may seem, we are not only helping them but supporting the children in our care too.

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Mary is an early years consultant and trainer, and has worked across the private, public and voluntary sectors, including management roles in Barnardo's and Sure Start programmes. She is the founder of The Totem Pole early years training and resource centre, and last September won 'Trainer of the Year' at the 2011 Nursery World Awards. Visit thetotempole.co.uk or call 01476 578 200.