

With the support of the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



Group production by: Berlin Cosmopolitan School Kindergarten & Preschool (Berlin),
ICEC (Helsinki), Universidad Camilo José Cela (Madrid), Pikler-Ház (Budapest)

Home Visits

Handbook for Early Years Professionals

1. Auflage

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Illustrationen: Katharina Ehrenfried
Design: Lennard Keltner
Druck und Bindung: addprint AG

Gedruckt auf Volume White Papier aus 100 % Altpapier ausgezeichnet mit dem blauen Umweltengel dem EU Eco-Label und FSC®-zertifiziert.

Printed in Germany

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HOME VISITS

HANDBOOK FOR EARLY YEARS PROFESSIONALS

"As a team, we will:

Communicate openly and honestly in order to build on one another's ideas.
Respect each other's differences, but keep the goal clear (for the children).
Encourage and motivate each other to enjoy the process through humour and
positivity.
Use flexibility and critical thinking to collaborate on shared goals."

Berlin, November, 2017

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(2017-2020)



This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS A HOME VISIT? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The home visit is the first face to face interaction the educators have with a family. One reason to meet in the home is to help families and their children to feel more comfortable entering into their new classroom. They are being visited in their environment and are able to tell as much or as little as they would like about themselves. Meeting the teachers in the kindergarten or classroom setting, could be overwhelming for some families. Home visits also give parents a better understanding of their child's new educators and pave the way for a home/ kindergarten connection.

The educators' reason for a home visit is to get to know the family from the home perspective, to meet them at their level and gain new insight. That in itself demonstrates how much they value the child and the family. Showing them this value allows families to ask their questions, express their concerns and feel good that they can do this in the comfort of their home. A home visit lasts about 20-30 minutes and allows for parents to ask questions and the educators to ask any questions they find important.

For example, "What is their sleeping schedule like?," "Have they been weaned off of breast feeding?," etc. These visits should end with the educators setting clear boundaries such as the time frame so that parents know they are important, but not that they can take up the educators' whole day. Of course, if something very important comes up, and it requires extra time, it is important to be flexible.

If time allows, home visits should occur before the child enters the classroom so that there is an initial contact with the families before the first day of kindergarten. Some educators have found the visit to be helpful after the child's first day in the kindergarten.

If this is the route that is to be taken, please have in depth contact via email with the families before their first days and have the home visit planned to be as soon as possible after their first day in the classroom. If home visits are not an option for the kindergarten or the parents, organizing a 25-30 minute meeting in the classroom or at the kindergarten where the children can interact and the parents can still comfortably express their questions and thoughts is imperative.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND IDEAS FOR HOME / CLASSROOM VISITS:

When visiting a family's home, introduce yourselves and be sure to check if shoes must be removed when arriving.

Beginning conversation strategies:

- Inform the family of plan for this time together.
 - Example: “We are here to get to know you and your child and learn about any questions you may have about the settling in process. We would love to just go through the general routine of our day, and how we plan to proceed with the settling in process. Does that sound good?”
 - Let them know there are 25-30 minutes for this meeting and you have set a timer for 25 minutes, and there is another visit next.
- Begin by asking family if they have any questions about the settling in process or anything kindergarten related in general. Use this time to learn from them about their worries and to answer them to help parents feel more comfortable.
- Go through the daily schedule, specific parts of the days (meal time, rest time, etc.) and how the parents can prepare for this at home.
 - Ask important questions regarding allergies, recurring illnesses (if applicable), nap time schedule, home language(s), sleeping and eating routines, previous kindergarten experience.
 - If family dynamic or structure hasn't been made clear, this can be a good time to ask about siblings, other partners, patchwork families, etc.
- Let the family know general information of how the settling in process works in your kindergarten. What should they expect the first few days and the parent's role when they are in the classroom. Think about sharing information of how can they prepare their child for this, and what type of behaviours or reactions they could expect as well as how they will proceed based on the child's interactions with the educators and the environment.
- Interact naturally with the child, ask parents if you can take a photo to have for the walls and labels in the classroom.

- When a timer set goes off, let the conversation wrap up as naturally as possible. Let the family know if they have any questions they can send an email or speak in person at the next meeting.

STRATEGIZING HOME VISITS:

If the team is two or three people in size, all or two of the educators can come to the visit. One person should never go alone as it is important for the educators to be seen by the parents as a whole. The child should typically be there so that the educators can say hello, have some interactions and ideally take some photos of the child so that they can have some for the first day.

DATES AND TIMES:

It is best to pick two or three days where all families can be visited in this time. Ideally within a couple weeks of the child's first day. If this is not possible, a month beforehand is alright, but of course the closer to the start of the settling in, the better. To help make this the most organized process, it makes sense to plan the visits by neighborhoods or areas, so that families who live near each other

can be visited on the same day or in the same block of time.

INFORMING AND PLANNING VISITS:

A month to a few weeks prior to the visits, an email should be sent to parents. Let them know it is best for their child to be present and awake so that the educators can interact with them as well. To keep things organized, it is recommended that educators ask parents for three times and days out of the days presented that work best for them. This structure allows the educators to look at where all the families live and base their schedule on location and the best times for the families. It is important not to inform any families of their chosen time until most the families have been heard from and all possibilities have been taken into account to help create a schedule that makes the most sense.

SAMPLE EMAIL ABOUT HOME VISITS:

Good Evening Families,

We hope you are having a great beginning of summer! We wanted to reach out because the Seahorses teachers are so excited to begin our year with you all and we would like to follow up since the Parents Eve. While your child will start in August, we would like to have another New Parents Eve to introduce the rest of our team and to answer any questions you may have. We will be in touch shortly with a new date, we hope we can see you there!

We also are thrilled to be able to offer home visits this year. Between July and August, we will be scheduling time for two or three of us to come to your home, learn a little more about your families and spend 20 -30 minutes getting to know you and interacting with your child. Attached is the planned sign up times. Please email us back with your TOP THREE choices for visits. We will then get back to you with your scheduled time. Please know that all of us are available to speak with you about any thoughts / questions you may have. Communication is the most important part of transitioning into kindergarten, and we look forward to connecting with all of you. Also, please feel free to send a few family photos as well as a couple pictures of your child so we can have their pictures up in our classroom when they begin. We cannot wait to meet your children and have a wonderful year!

Looking forward to hearing from you,

The Seahorse Teachers

SAMPLE SCHEDULE CHART FOR HOME VISITS:

Please choose your top three choices!

**If these times and days do not work with your schedule or you will be on holiday, please inform us so that we may work together to find a good time to come to you or to invite you into the kindergarten for a short visit!

Friday, July 13th	Home Visits Name, address, Phone number	
Child's name, parent's name, address and phone number		13:00
		14:00
		15:00
		16:00
Monday, July 16th	Home Visits Name, address, Phone number	
Child's name, parent's name, address and phone number		9:00
		10:00
		11:00
		12:00

Friday, July 13th	Home Visits Name, address, Phone number	
	Child's name, parent's name, address and phone number	9:00
		10:00
		11:00
		13:15
		14:00
		15:00

OUTCOMES OF HOME VISITS

Outcomes of home visits are almost always positive; they help to build trust and openness between families and educators and begin a line of communication. They allow for the child to see the educators as people that were welcomed into their home by their parents, meaning that they are trusted.

FINDING TIME TO REFLECT ON HOME VISITS

In addition to the home visits, finding time to reflect on the process together

with colleagues is vital for success in the settling in phase. The impressions, ideas and thoughts after the visit should be shared and potentially discussed within the team in order to get all educators that are involved on the same page and draw implications for future work. The educators' perceptions of the situation might differ, or the team might have to find a shared approach for working with this specific child and family. Teams who take the time to reflect and discuss the situation of meeting the new child and family will be better prepared in welcoming the child and family into the classroom

setting and providing a nurturing and professional environment. Here are example questions you could use to debrief the home visit with your team:

- What were my initial thoughts when I met the child and the family?
- What did I find most striking about the home visit?
- What do I think the child and the family need from us? How can we as a team support a positive settling in experience for this child and family?
- Where do I see potential challenges and how can I contribute with knowledge or experience to overcome these challenges?

their own biases about seeing the homes of their families. These are always possibilities. However, the most important factor in a settling in is for trust to be established, and this cannot be done of parents or educators have their own hang ups. It is important to try to push these aside and think about the children and how to best ensure that they have a positive settling in process, beginning with a positive home visit or meeting.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE IMPACTS FROM HOME VISITS?

From personal experiences of the researchers, home visits have rendered a positive outcome. However, perhaps parents are worried about their home being judged due to their financial status or educators are concerned about





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Children need healthy environments in which to grow, develop, play and learn. Their environments are complex and ever-changing.

The adult can be a role model, providing children with appropriate, healthy options and behaviour in all aspects of life.

This way, educators and families are helping children develop into confident, independent people who have a strong sense of self-efficacy, empathy and are internationally minded.

