

Supporting Transitions for Children and Young People in Care



Cambridgeshire Virtual School

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Introduction

There are a plethora of online resources and publications aimed at offering advice and guidance in supporting care-experienced children and young people through times of transition.

This toolkit is a summary of the common issues surrounding transition for children and young people, as well as a guide to the considerations that should be taken by those supporting them. We offer some practical strategies to support transition periods as well as providing a list of useful links to other organisations and support materials.



The ideas and strategies suggested in this toolkit will need to be adapted to be applicable in different situations and with different ages and different levels of understanding. However, it is clear that whatever the age or stage of the child or young person being supported, the underlying principles for support remain the same. Where there are specific considerations which need to be taken into account for particular transition points, these are clearly identified.

Transition is not just about the major changes that occur in phases throughout life. There are many transitions which occur in a typical day. For example, from one task to another; moving from one room to another; from home to school/college and back again; inside to outside; classroom to break time. As children develop from infancy to childhood to adolescence and to adulthood, there are many transitions: from home, to nursery, to school, to secondary, to college and beyond. Many people find these changes difficult, but sometimes they can be even more challenging for children and young people who have experienced or are experiencing life in care.

Being care-experienced and transitions

Change is difficult for many children and young people who are currently or who have previously been in care. This is because children who have experienced early trauma and unhealthy attachments do not know that change is OK; being able to know that change is OK can only come when you have a secure basis to place that on. Care-experienced children have often experienced a high level of change in their lives – much of it not very good – therefore any change from what they are used to can trigger fear and anxiety. These children need to be protected from and supported through further transitions as a matter of priority in order to work towards increasing stability.

A new school, class or member of staff can be a huge change, as can a new task or activity, or a game they've never played before. Similarly ending a task or activity that they have enjoyed can make them feel that if they stop now, they may never get to do this again.

There is constant change in all of our lives: starting new stages of education, each new year, the move to secondary and college, new homes. For vulnerable children normal changes within their education can be hugely challenging.

Care-experienced children may find it difficult to regulate their behaviour and emotions at times of change and transition. They may become upset or highly excitable, overly helpful or excessively friendly. They may become more clingy and attention needing and demonstrate controlling behaviours, trying to make sure that they will be safe and have their needs met. They may ask constant questions or chatter excessively – just wanting to know you are there and that you can see and hear them. Other areas of concerns may also become more prominent such as eating issues, soiling and wetting, sleep problems or engaging in high risk behaviours such as: substance misuse, self-harm or high vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Or perhaps they may not show any outward signs of distress, but instead may be working hard not wanting to be noticed and avoiding showing signs of anxiety.

Specific advice for schools regarding transitions into a pre-adoptive placement can be found at:

<https://www.cambslearntogether.co.uk/school-improvement/cambridgeshire-s-virtual-school-for-looked-after-children/previously-looked-after-children/>

Typical transitions for care-experienced children include:

- Standard year group and key stage changes (within the setting)
- Standard phase settings (to a different setting)
- School moves (planned or emergency)
- Care placement moves (maintaining and changing school placement)
- Becoming CiC/ceasing to be CiC
- Becoming a care leaver

Within settings typical transitions for looked after children include:

- Moving from one task to another
- Moving from one classroom to another
- Home to school/college
- Inside to outside (and back again)
- Learning time to break time (and back again)
- Changes of teaching/supervising staff

How do you feel if you are rushed on from one experience to another?

How do you feel when ceasing an activity you enjoy?

How do you feel when entering a new situation?

Considerations for Success

In schools we aim to pack so much into the school day; we have become highly efficient and there are countless changes which need to be negotiated throughout each day, term and year. Children and young people who have experienced trauma and loss find change difficult and are frequently not able to move at the fast pace typically expected during transitions.

A high level of preparation is required in order to manage change well. This will include a higher level of prompting and reminders, as well as sharing the 'what' of what is coming next. Extra time may be needed to ensure the child or young person is able to process the transition in advance in order to optimise the next learning opportunity.

Reflective time can also offer children and young people a chance to think about what has been achieved and learned and process everything which has been happening at school. Specific transition experiences and journeys can be explored to support this.

Learn about the individual:

It is vital that information is shared to support all transitions.

- All staff need to have an understanding of attachment and trauma; training should be put in place to ensure this. Staff need to understand how early adverse childhood experiences impact on behaviour and learning and how this may present in an educational setting.
- Staff need to be aware of triggers and sensitive issues specific to individual children, this may include information they wish to share about experiences prior to care, including positive experiences they might have had.
- Consider individual needs to allow time for processing transitions. Does the child or young person need to finish something early to provide necessary transition time or perhaps they may need a higher level of warnings before an activity or task ceases?
- How does the individual child communicate anxiety or fear through their behaviour? For some children this may be increasingly noticeable behaviour whilst others may withdraw – distress presents differently in different children.
- Differentiate expectations for transitions
- Offer individualised resources (visual cues, adult prompts, checklists...)

Standard year group and key stage changes (within the setting)

Possible difficulties and challenges

- New teacher
- Loss of trusted adults and peers
 - Change of peer group
 - New environment
 - Sensory challenges
 - Change of routine
- Adapting to different personalities of teaching staff and teaching assistants
 - Increased expectations and responsibilities
- Increased academic expectations



Potential strategies to support

- Transition books
- Visits to new classroom
- Time with new teacher and teaching assistants
- Pre-teaching and pre-warning
 - Transitional objects
 - Buddy system
- Key member of staff to support at times of need
- Pre-teaching of new routines
- Use of daily checklists and visual timetables
- Transition groups to prepare



Standard phase change (different school or setting)

Possible difficulties and challenges

- New teacher(s)
- Move from one to multiple teachers
- Loss of trusted adults and peers
 - Change of peer group
 - New environment
 - Change of routine
- Adapting to different personalities of teaching staff and teaching assistants
 - Increased expectations and responsibilities
- Expectation of independence and self-direction
- Increased level of academic expectations
 - Change of journey

Facts about my new school

My **new** school starts at.....

Break time is at the morning.

It lasts for..... minutes.

Lunchtime starts at.....and finishes

Home time is at.....



School staff



My Head Teachers name is

My **new** Head Teacher/Warden name is

My Deputy Head Teacher name is

My **new** Deputy Head Teacher name is

In my **new** school they have a Head of Year.

The Head of Year 7 name is

At my **new** school I will have a **Form Tutor** whose name is

My form is called

A **Form Tutor** is the person who takes the register. He/she is someone who can answer my questions about my **new** school.

Potential strategies to support

- Transition books
- Photographs of new adults and environment
- Identification of key adult and safe place to withdraw to if needed
- Range of visits to new school/setting
 - Time with teacher/TAs
- Thorough information sharing
- Pre-teaching and pre-warning
 - Transitional objects
- Whole school training in attachment and trauma
- Access to homework clubs
- Inclusion in extra-curricular activities

School move (planned or emergency)



Possible difficulties and challenges

- Loss of trusted adults and peers
- Loss of siblings and community
- Loss of extra-curricular activities
- Lack of closure
- Lack of familiarity
- Social and emotional regression
- Impact on courses (KS4 and beyond)
- Transfer of records/assessment data
- Feelings evoked by a forced move
- Delays in admissions and time out of school, interim home tuition
- New school not having full information

Fun things!

- ✦
- ✦
- ✦

Things that help me stay calm

-
-
-

When I am worried

-
-
-

How you can help me

-
-
-

COMMUNICATION - PLEASE DO

-
-
-

COMMUNICATION PLEASE DON'T!

-
-
-

Potential strategies to support

- Prompt information sharing and communication
- Teachers from previous school to visit new school
- Goodbye cards and photographs for memory boxes
- Feedback from new school to previous school
- Focus on nurture and developing relationships
- Opportunities to embrace new community including extra-curricular, enrichment activities
- Different types of families
- View new school website with child



Care placement moves (maintaining and changing school placement)

Possible difficulties and challenges

- Distance and implications for journey time (including arriving at school early/late)
- Experience of taxi journey
- Building relationship with new carers
- Loss of control for child and possible separation from siblings
- Loss of wider community
- Loss of clubs/activities out of school
- High levels of anxiety and instability
- Increased feeling of rejection and uncertainty
- Loss of trust
- Birth parent involvement



Potential strategies to support

- Reassurance that school is a safe place – key member of staff to act as secure base
- Staff aware on a 'need to know' basis
- Communication between schools
- Information sharing of child's strengths and interests
- Inclusion in extra-curricular activities
- Prompt communication of changes and sharing of need/sensitive issues
- Ensure carer meets school and receives all school communications
- Bespoke timetable

Becoming CiC/Ceasing to be CiC (Child in Care)

Possible difficulties and challenges

- What information should be shared? How? Who with?
- Understanding statutory processes (PEP meetings and role of the DT)
- Journey to school
- Insecurity and child's loss of control
- Worries for child regarding birth family, feelings of guilt including third party communication
- Perceived view of community
- Changes of status regarding FSM
- Child may not have personal items
- New home, new routines, new expectations

**Free
School
Meals**



Are you entitled?



Potential strategies to support

- Timely communication of changes
- Information shared on a 'need to know' basis
- Child having a voice
- Prompt development of relationship between school and carers
- Whole staff training in attachment and trauma
- Designated teacher/person aware of statutory duties
- Positive models of different families
- Opportunities for separated siblings to spend time together in school
- Pupil premium plus spending

Wherever possible pupils should be kept in the same school, in familiar classes and in the same school environment in order to increase their feelings of stability. We need to do everything we can to foster permanence. There will sometimes be a need for a child to move on – perhaps as part of a standard phase change or perhaps to a new school or care placement. Communication, reflection, preparation and follow-up are essential in line with the child’s developmental age and stage.

Strategies and considerations to support transition into an Early Years Placement:

- Home visits
- Visits to nursery/pre-school with parents/carers
- Support separation from carer into setting
- Phased entry including access to quieter sessions or visits outside of hours to ensure familiarisation with environment
- Photobook with relevant staff pictures, photos of activities and areas in setting
- Attachment and trauma training for staff
- All staff aware of sensitive issues
- Pen portrait/all about me drawn up with social worker and carers
- Staff to be aware of people important to child and know names, relationships, dynamics...
- Specific resources provided in line with child’s interests
- Transitional objects bought into setting/taken home
- Activities offered in line with emotional as well as chronological age
- Designated person to have attended relevant training

The Transition from Early Years to primary school:

- Attachment and trauma training for staff including office staff, mid-day meal supervisors and other relevant support staff
- Transition visits into new school, child to be accompanied by a familiar adult and sample various sessions including structured lessons, assembly, lunch and play
- Home visits
- Early years setting to keep the journey into school visible through resources and discussion in the setting
- Transition pack to be developed for the child, including photos and an “all about my new school” booklet

- Transition planning meeting with foster carers, social worker and virtual school
- New school to visit child in existing setting
- Focus on learning to learn behaviours, for example listening to teacher, adult directed tasks, sitting for longer periods etc.
- Teaching policies, objectives and outcomes shared with carers, for example phonics and calculations policies
- If appropriate, plan an extended transition period

The Transition from primary school to secondary school:

- Consider an enhanced transition package and participation in summer school
- Provide a map of the new school building, colour code subjects and classrooms, highlight important areas eg. dining hall/canteen, locker, hall, sport's changing rooms
- Consider and practice the journey to and from school
- Make the timetable easy to use for the individual
- Photobook with relevant staff pictures, photos of activities and visual cues
- Create daily checklists so that the correct items are taken to/from school
- Create a user friendly diary for organising homework
- Set up a 'buddy system' with a designated older student/peer/group to help the individual move between classes
- Assign a member of staff as a 'mentor' and identify a place of safety which can be sought in times of crisis/anxiety
- Plan a consistent approach between lessons including a 'script' which is used by all staff in times of crisis/anxiety
- Ensure all members of staff are familiar with individual needs and considerations. Consider a pupil passport or profile.
- Consider procedures and extra-curricular opportunities for unstructured times and identify good role models and 'safe' peers and places who will offer support at these times
- Pre-teach new vocabulary including: form, head of year, resource centre, subject specific vocabulary
- Identify a system of home-school liaison
- Ensure thorough information sharing, secondary school to attend final PEP in Year 6 as a minimum
- Listen to pupil voice and be responsive to this, including the pupil's view on the sharing of their care status and any script which needs developing

The Transition from secondary school to post-16 options:

- Visit settings well in advance to support informed decisions (including open days and taster days)
- Tutors should be prepared to meet the student before the course to discuss any concerns and requirements
- Consider opportunities to manage extended summer holidays including NCS in order to maintain motivation
- Provide a map of the new building
- Make the timetable easy to use for the individual and support young people to manage changes to this as they arise
- Continue to support and expect a high level of carer involvement to ensure success
- Support the student to access libraries, resource centres and online profiles
- Assign a member of staff as a 'mentor' and identify a place of safety which can be sought in times of crisis/anxiety
- Ensure student is aware of student services
- Practice the journey to and from college
- Provide support in accessing grants and bursaries
- Support to manage time outside of structured college timetables
- Listen to the young person's voice and be responsive to this, including the young person's view on the sharing of their care status and any script which needs developing
- Be aware that this may coincide with a possible move into semi-independent living for the young person

The Transition into Higher Education

- Provide opportunities to attend open days
- Support completion of UCAS process
- What support can be offered 52 weeks a year, including year round accommodation
- Provide support in accessing grants and bursaries
- Ensure awareness of student support services
- Support management of timetable and strategies to maintain motivation and independent study
- For further information, please refer to 'Higher Education Guide for Cambridgeshire Care Leavers' <https://www.cambslearntogether.co.uk/school-improvement/cambridgeshire-s-virtual-school-for-looked-after-children/further-information-about-looked-after-children-for-schools-and-settings/>

Specific Considerations for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

- Be aware of stage of English language development and cultural differences
- Acknowledge the journey which the young person may have undertaken and trauma linked to and arising from this
- Be prepared to invest additional time developing and acknowledging the young person's history and previous experiences
- Maintain high expectations and explore extent and range of prior learning to ensure suitability of courses
- Recognise anxiety around immigration processes

Involve carers (including foster carers, residential workers):

- Ensure regular communication between home and school so that care planning updates, sensitive issues, individual needs etc. can be shared
- Ensure that carers are aware of specific homework policies and expectations
- Ensure that carers are registered to receive emails and that they can access online assessment/homework sites
- Ensure that carers are aware of all meetings (including PEPs) and are invited to all relevant school events
- Support carers to make links with other parents/carers to foster community links
- Make sure that carers are aware of all of the variables around the transition so that they can work that into the way they communicate the transition to the child
- Invite carers into the setting/school to help settle the child in
- Carers to familiarise child with new uniform, school bag, equipment
- Carers to practice the journey
- Carers to establish a homework routine/system for meeting deadlines

Involve social workers:

- Maintain strong links with social workers
- Ensure that social workers are fully informed regarding transitions and any difficulties arising and are present at all relevant meetings

Strategies for support:

(source: 'What About Me?' Louise Michelle Bomber)

Visual cues

There are a variety of visual timers which can be used in schools and settings, such as:

- Gel timers
- Sand timers
- Diaries and calendars
- Visual timetables
- Mobile phone timers
- Online calendars

Sometimes verbal cues are not enough and visual or tangible cues are much more relevant, just as we would use with much younger children. Many of these children and young people have little concept of time and need an opportunity to 'feel' what time feels like.

Checklists

Checklists can be created to help prepare for transition. Checklists break down complex tasks that involve many expectations into simpler chunks that are clear and straightforward to follow. A simple list can mean that the children and young people is less likely to feel overwhelmed and make even difficult tasks bearable. Checklists teach the brain how organisation works so that transitions can be made successfully.

Memory cards

Memory cards are very supportive in terms of helping children and young people to 'hold on' or 'wait', so that they can temporarily come away from something that they might be in the middle of. Many children and young people will find it extremely hard to stop mid-flow. Not all lesson timings will allow for completion of work in one sitting. So we need to prepare for this possibility with some supportive scaffolding.

Transitional Objects

Transitional objects are objects which are taken from home into the setting and reinforce to the child that they will therefore be going back to that home. This object may have a specific smell or belong to an important person or be a photograph. Similarly, children can take items from school home, including class pets and photographs, to reinforce to them that they will be returning to school and not moving on.

Pupil profiles/passports

Profiles and passports are summary documents about a child and preferably they are contained on one page. They are a very child centred approach and in fact should be created with the majority of input coming from the child themselves, hence promoting pupil voice. They enable key information about the individual's needs to be shared with all staff (including cover staff, offering a summary of need and strategies which are effective as well as sharing strengths).

Further examples of one page profiles can be found at:

<http://www.sheffkids.co.uk/adultsite/pages/onepageprofiletemplates.html>

SEAL Resources

Within the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning themes, 'New Beginnings' and 'Changes' tackle the issue of transition and change in order to equip children with an understanding of different types of change, positive and negative, and common human responses to it. The themes seek to develop children and young people's ability to understand and manage the feelings associated with change and to develop knowledge, understanding and skills in three key social and emotional aspects of learning: motivation, social skills and managing feelings.

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110812101121tf_/http://nsonline.org.uk/node/87009

Things I am looking forward to...

Things I want to leave behind...

Things I want to take with me...

NAME: J0000000
D.O.B: J0000000
YEAR GROUP: 6

PUPIL PROFILE

Things you need to know about me:
I am confused in Maths.
I find writing tasks difficult.
ICT is my favourite subject.
I enjoy learning new things.

Things I'm good at:
I am good at Maths.
I like to help others.
I am very friendly.
I know a lot about cars and love to share my knowledge.
I am enthusiastic about learning.
I'm good at cooking with my mum's help.
I'm good at video games, especially car games.
I enjoy playing the piano.
I'm good at tennis.
I'm good at using computers.
I try to always have a positive attitude towards learning.

Things I like and dislike:
I love cars!
I like making and playing with friends.
I don't like it when I'm given instructions that I don't understand and I can't have them repeated again.
I don't like it when people yell at me.
I don't like being bullied.

Top tips to help me:
I need teachers to clearly explain each step of a task to help me understand completely.
I learn and concentrate better when I am at the front of the class, near the teacher.
I like it when teachers check that I understand what to do in my work.
I take things literally. If you say you're going to take me to my chair for fighting, I actually think you are going to do it.
I enjoy working in a group or with a partner more than working by myself.
I find it hard to concentrate when it is too noisy in the classroom.

Exercises to help pupils think about the process of saying goodbye and transitions: (source: PAC-UK)

The who and the how

Together with the child, make a list with two columns headed 'who' and 'how', Help the child to identify who they need to say goodbye to, and how they will do it e.g. making a card for the class teacher.

This can be adapted to think about who the child would like to stay in touch with, and how they might do this with different people; staying in touch reinforces the message that the child exists to the person even when they no longer meet every day.

A big enough heart

Help the child to identify the people they like and love in the school or family they will be moving on from. Note those people down. Draw a large heart which encompasses these people but still has lots of space. This can illustrate to the child that they can carry people with them in their heart, and still have space for the people they will be building relationships with at their next school or family.

The bridge

Sketch out the context (school or family) which the child is leaving, and the one the child will be joining. Draw a bridge which links the two, and position the child on the bridge. This provides a way to talk about the move, and the feelings (e.g. excitement and anxiety) which come with being 'in between', particularly in the long school holidays.

Bag of feelings

With the child, draw a bag: If you had a bag with all your feelings in it about moving school, what would it look like? What feelings would be inside? How big would the happy/sad/scared part be?

Story books

There are a variety of story books available to support children who are experiencing or have experienced care which are relevant for transition.

Further resources can be found at <https://incentiveplus.co.uk/> <https://www.adoptionuk.org/>

For further advice and guidance, including the signposting to resources please contact the Virtual School virtuelschool@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Training for schools and setting can accessed from the virtual school:

<https://www.cambslearntogether.co.uk/school-improvement/cambridgeshire-s-virtual-school-for-looked-after-children/courses-and-bookings/>

With thanks:

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References:

- 'What About Me?' Louise Michelle Bomber
- 'The Teacher's Introduction to Attachment' Nicola Marshall