
Supporting Transitions for all Pupils

Guidance, Advice and Resources for School Staff

Developed by Leeds Educational Psychology Team

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Supporting Transitions

Transition

Transition can be defined as a process, rather than a one-off event, which includes a period of change in relational, social, educational, occupational and/or physical life. Transition usually involves novel or new experiences, which are different from previous experiences. People's experiences of these new or novel experiences can lead to a mixture of feelings including, but not limited to, excitement, joy, relief, worry, anxiety and sadness. Transitions for children and young people are part and parcel of the process of moving through educational stages and can provide opportunities for growth and development. However, by their very nature, transitions involve change which can be associated with a lack of familiarity, uncertainty and strong emotional responses (both positive and more challenging!).

What Makes a 'Good' Transition?

It is also important to emphasise that many of the familiar practices and approaches you use, as skilled staff, to support transitions throughout the school year are important and relevant. Indeed, you will all have an understanding of what makes a 'good' transition for your children and young people.

Research suggests that 'good' transitions are supported by *clear planning and preparation* alongside explicit *communication* with key people involved. For instance, it is important that plans for supporting the return to school are developed on a school-wide level, to enable consistency, and that more individualised plans for pupils who may need enhanced support are developed. Alongside this, ongoing communication with pupils, parents/carers and school will be important in supporting their understanding and preparation for the transition. Most importantly, 'good' transition is underpinned by positive and trusting relationships between all involved.

The following guidance aims to build upon your existing and familiar practices of effective transition support, by offering supplementary practical advice on how to best support this. The guidance primarily focuses on and recognises approaches and practices which school staff use to create environments focused on meeting two core needs of children and young people: the need for connection and the need for safety.

Underpinned by research and practice which explores not only how to support transitions, but how to also support and enable children and young people following adversity or sudden change, the following guidance provides understandings and practical ideas related to seven areas:

- Experiencing a sense of safety and security,
- Re-affirming relationships, connection and belonging,
- Supporting emotional recognition, exploration and regulation,
- Establishing routines,
- Supporting the return to learning,
- Acknowledging and reflecting on experiences,
- Promoting a hopeful future.

It is acknowledged that staff well-being is an integral part of this period of transition and consideration must be given to supporting this. Please see our separate guidance on this aspect.

Key Ideas to Support Transitions

Experiencing a sense of safety and security

It is important to recognise that all children have experienced 'loss' at some level over the past few months. All have missed learning time and social opportunities, many are likely to have experienced disruption in their home lives and relationships, and some may have been bereaved of family members, friends or other known individuals in their lives. Normal routines and structures have been undermined, and adults may have been less able to provide typical levels of reassurance, guidance and security. This has the potential to impact on children and young people's sense of safety, one of the basic human needs, and helping pupils to feel safe will be a crucial aspect to their transitions. A feeling of security will provide a physical and emotional foundation that will enable pupils to re-establish confidence in their environment, and thus promote resilience.

Certain principles will be useful in helping pupils to feel safe, and the adults working with them will need to convey messages that communicate security, both implicitly and explicitly. Particular messages can be shared with children and young people, to support feelings of safety, through both interactions and actions. School staff should work on conveying the following affirmations to support feelings of safety:

- 'You are welcome here, and you belong',
- 'You are a liked and valued member of the school community',
- 'Your feelings are valid and important',
- 'We can learn and explore together',
- 'You are physically safe, and emotionally cared for in school',
- 'There are some things we do not know yet, but there remains things we can be sure of'.

The following six areas will all contribute to re-establishing a sense of safety and security for children and young people in school.

Re-affirming relationships, connection and belonging



Feeling connected to others, and having a sense of belonging to a group, are particularly important. Relationships are recognised as a key protective factor in supporting a child to respond and adapt to challenging events or transitions. School can provide a community of support for children and young people, and it is through the relationships they have with friends and school staff that they may begin to recover and make sense of events which have occurred. Therefore, it is important that all children and staff have opportunities to re-establish and re-affirm their relationships with each other. School staff will need permission to prioritise relational wellbeing and opportunities for connection.

Pupils feel connected to school when they: experience safe, nurturing relationships with adults who show they care; have opportunities to participate in shared activities and experiences with their peer group; and are able to participate in activities which are recognised as providing a valued contribution to the school community.

Practical Ideas

- When considering grouping pupils, staff should plan for children and young people to be in groups with familiar peers, who they have existing friendships with, and for them to be supported by familiar and consistent staff wherever possible.
- Prior to the transition, teachers, teaching assistants or key adults may want to send postcards home to children and young people which focus on helping the children and young people feel 'held in my mind' by school staff.
- Opportunities to develop a sense of community cohesion within a group can be facilitated through the use of fun games or challenges which require co-operation.
- Consider the use of a 'buddy system' to ensure that all young people feel they can access peer support if needed.
- Utilise daily check-ins with children and young people, similar to circle time questions, which can enable children and young people to re-affirm similarities and likenesses between themselves and peers.
- If pupils are unable to spend time with their friends from their previous class, consider pairing up children from the same original to be email/pen pals. Children and young people can write emails, letters and/or draw pictures to one another to maintain connections.

Supporting emotional recognition, expression and regulation

How children and young people react to events will depend on the individuals' particular circumstances, including available support systems to enable making sense of and adapting to change. When pupils transition to a new class or school, we might expect to see a range of emotional responses and there is no 'right or wrong' in responses, or an expectation of how children should respond. For some children and young people, they may present as calm, settled and regulated. Some children may explicitly share worries or anxieties they might have, whilst others may communicate their feelings through their actions or behaviours. It will be important for all staff to understand the connection between emotions and behaviour, particularly when a child may be presenting with difficulties regulating emotions. School staff will need to be reflective and consider the emotions underlying the behaviour, and responding through supported regulation, rather than responding just to the behaviour. School staff should also recognise that feelings of anxiety and worry are 'normal' within the circumstances and providing space and time to listen to just listen to young people can be helpful.

Practical Ideas

- Use scripts and 'wondering aloud' techniques to help children and young people to recognise and explore their feelings. The following structure might be helpful: *'I can see that you're doing [.....], I'm wondering if you're feeling [.....], I'm thinking you might need [.....]'*. Consider using the 'CONNECT' model for younger pupils (see Appendix 1).
- Introduce activities which focus on developing emotional literacy, such as books which explore themes related to emotions and feelings.
- Introduce daily activities which focus on relaxation, such as mindfulness exercises, breathing activities or yoga type movements. Examples of activities can be found in Appendix 2.

- Set up a space in the classroom, such as quiet corner, or a quiet reflective space in school, where children or young people can choose to take time out if needed. This could include access to activities or resources that can instil a sense of calm or help children to feel grounded (puzzles, jigsaws, books, music, sensory materials, creative arts etc.).

Establishing routines

As recognised in the ‘experiencing a sense of safety and security’ section, an important priority will be supporting children and young people to feel emotionally and physically safe within the school setting. The establishment of consistent and predictable routines are an important element of enabling children and young people to feel safe secure. Routines, expectations, rules and boundaries will need to be set.

Practical Ideas

- New routines, or changes to existing routines, should be clearly and explicitly shared with pupils, and phrased positively. For some children and young people, the use of social stories to explain these new routines prior to returning to school will be particularly helpful in supporting their understanding.
- Any routines or rules which are established will need to be applied consistently across all staff within a setting. As such, it will be important that rules and expectations regarding any need for physical distance are agreed amongst all staff and respected to provide children with consistent messages of what is okay/not okay.
- In the early years and key stage one, consider utilising auditory and visual cues to indicate daily transitions.
- Visual timetables and reminders should be displayed in classrooms, and referred to regularly throughout the day.
- Complete a class or group discussion which focuses on establishing ground rules which focus on supporting all children to feel safe. It will be important that these are co-constructed with groups and classes, with regular reviews of rules based on any changes in guidance.

Supporting the return to learning

During the period of learning at home, children and young people’s access to and engagement with learning experiences are likely to have been different and various (Sutton Trust, 2020). There has also been ongoing reports, within mainstream media, that some children and young people will have “fallen behind” academically. These reports make it tempting to prioritise catch-up programmes or interventions for children and young people on the return to school. However, it is vital that we move beyond these narratives and prioritise providing children and young people with a gradual, and slow paced, return to re-engagement with learning within the school environment (see ‘PACE’ing the return to learning below). Within this, it will be important for school staff to maintain high expectations for their pupils, offer work which is engaging, exciting and challenging, and provide opportunities for activities which are meaningful and purposeful to the child or young person.

Playfulness	Acceptance	Curiosity	Empathy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an atmosphere of lightness, interest and intrigue in the classroom. • Learning should include hands-on experiences embedded in play and fun. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate unconditional acceptance of where each child is in their learning journey. • Teachers will need to meet children and young people where they are and gradually rebuild feelings of competence and confidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults should maintain curiosity about children's and young people's learning experiences during their time out of school. • Differences between children and young people within the group should be positively recognised and valued. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults should recognise and accept the feelings children and young people may share about their learning experiences. • Children and young people should continue to be supported to name difficult emotions which might arise when returning to learning experiences in school.

Practical Ideas

- Provide access to activities and tasks which repeat, reinforce and consolidate previous learning. This will not only enable children and young people to experience feelings of success and competence, but can also be the foundation for introducing new topics.
- Allow children and young people some autonomy within their learning and set aside some time each day to engage in a preferred activity or special project related to a topic of their choosing.
- Carefully scaffold learning tasks, including the chunking of activities into smaller individual tasks, and provide supportive and constructive feedback.
- Consider using the 'Challenging Minds' resource, for older children (primary and secondary) which focuses on developing a child's thinking and problem solving skills (resource available from your link EP).

Acknowledging and reflecting on experiences

"We are in the same storm, but not in the same boat"

The quote above has been taken from a poem which has been shared frequently on social media. The poem has come to represent how each individual's experiences are different and likely dependent on a multitude of factors. This will also be the case for our children and young people. As such, it will be important for children and young people to have opportunities to talk about, share, and reflect on their experiences. Research suggests that for some children and young people, opportunities to reflect on their experiences may be important in helping them make sense of the event through collective meaning making. This would also be an opportunity to reflect on positive stories too. This could include considering what might have changed possibly for the better or what has been brought into sharper focus for us.

Practical Ideas and Considerations

- Class/ tutor groups could come together to share and celebrate something they have each achieved recently.
- Activities to consider the role of the individual, family and community, and how everyone can come together to support one another.
- Projects reflecting on what might have changed for the better.
- However, it will also be important to recognise that some children and young people they may not wish to talk about their experiences. It will be important for school staff to take cues from the child or young person, regarding their preference, and explicitly communicate acceptance if a child chooses not to participate or contribute to particular activities.

Promoting a hopeful future

As part of supporting children and young people's transitions, school staff may need to provide modelling of hope and optimism for the future, alongside supporting children and young people to recognise their agency and self-efficacy in enabling this future to happen. Children and young people may need ongoing opportunities to be reminded of their strengths and successes.

Practical Ideas

- Support children and young people to set small, achievable goals on both a personal and collective basis, and then provide opportunities for them to reflect on the skills, strengths and abilities they have shown when these goals have been achieved.
- Use solution-focussed questions to support children and young people to reflect on their strengths, aspirations, hopes and dreams (e.g. asking with interest, **'what are you good at?'** **'And what else?'** **'When you are at your best, what are proud to notice about yourself?'** **'How could these skills/strengths be used in other ways?'** etc.).
- Provide opportunities for children and young people to plan and consider for next steps, particularly children in Year 6 through to secondary school (please see Appendix 4 and 5 for examples).
- Practice gratitude by supporting children and young people to share, note down or draw 'three good things' per day.
- For children and young people at key transition points, i.e. Year 6, Year 11, Year 13 etc., opportunities for reflection on their primary or secondary school experiences, alongside discussion linked to moving on, has potentially been interrupted by the Covid pandemic. In order to support this process of reflection, a resource has been developed which aims to engage young people in an activity which allows them to think about the transition happening for them currently. The resource utilises an adapted version of the narrative tool 'Tree of Life' and has written specifically for pupils to engage in the process independently (the resource can be found at the following web link under the 'transitions' tab: <http://www.leedsforlearning.co.uk/Page/17462>). The resource could also be used by school staff to engage in the 'Tree of Life' process as part of a larger group. School staff wishing to use this resource may wish to speak with their school's Educational Psychologist for advice on how to engage and support children and young people in this process.

References

Information in this guidance has been taken from a number of available resources. Special thanks and acknowledgement to:

- BiBorough Educational Psychology Consultation Service - 'Transition, Learning and Recovery in the aftermath of a pandemic' resource
- Dr Chris Moore (Educational Psychologist) - [Supporting post-lockdown education using the 6 principles of nurture.](#)
- Mary Meredith (Head of Inclusion, Lincolnshire County Council) - [Five ways to help children heal when schools reopen.](#)
- Steve Russell (Leadership, Wellbeing and Behaviour Consultation) - Using affirmations to support transition
- Dr Meryl Forse (Gateway Psychology) - [Safety in Uncertain Times.](#)
- Barry Carpenter and Matthew Carpenter - [Recovery Curriculum: Loss and Life for our children and schools post pandemic](#)
- Maxine Fletcher (Educational Psychologist) 'My Tree of Life'. A Narrative tool for children and young people at transition.

Resources

Appendix 1. Using the 'CONNECT' Model to Support Regulation of Younger

Children - developed by Dr Kirsten Krawczyk and Dr Sarah Modi - informed by the work from [Emotion Coaching UK](#)

C - Check in (with the moment and with your feelings)

- Adults should be aware of their own emotions before responding to children. Children are adept at picking up on emotional cues, even if they do not understand them. Convey a sense of calm by paying attention to tone of voice, and word choices - young children need these to be short, easy to understand, and kind, as well as acknowledging their feelings.

O - Opportunity for teaching

- Observe how younger children may be expressing their feelings through behaviour. Babies and toddlers may cry more than usual and want to be held/cuddled. Slightly older children may regress a little, e.g. have more toileting accidents, tantrums, difficulties with sleeping and separation. Some may talk about their fears - providing an opportunity to model managing and naming feelings, answer questions honestly (at their level of understanding) and to reassure. Consider children's emotional reactions and behaviours as communication, and an opportunity to connect and support them with coping-strategies.

N - Notice

- It is important to be aware of the different emotions young children may feel (demonstrated by behaviour). Consider their perspective to help interpret how they might be feeling, name and acknowledge the feeling, and pace responses to them accordingly. Consider what they might need to feel calm: sharing a picture book, "grounding" by using their senses to see, hear, smell what is going on around them, taking 3 deep slow breaths.

N - Name and normalise the feeling

- "That's OK, we all feel a bit worried when things change." By doing this we are helping young children to recognise their feelings and acquire a feelings vocabulary.

E - Empathise

- Empathising/"tuning in" can help children to gradually develop these skills for themselves. Adults can contain emotional reactions, and support with managing confusing feelings, making sense and reassuring. "I can see you are feeling a bit scared, but we can do things like wash our hands to keep safe."

C - Consider setting limits

- Routines and boundaries are especially important. Young children need the reassurance provided by simple, clear everyday routines. Routines that respond to their needs provide a sense of safety. Maintain consistency and a sense of rhythm. Reaffirm boundaries when needed. Young children's understanding is concrete and rooted in the 'here and now'. "I wonder if you are upset because you can't play with your friends? Keeping safe is important for everybody, so let's pick up the Lego you have thrown on the floor and then we can go outside to play."

T -, and problem-solve together

- Adults and children explore solutions to problems together. Use time together to develop social skills, communication and engagement, follow the child's lead, ask to join in, play simple games, take turns. Encourage self-efficacy by offering simple choices, "Do you want to play with the big ball or the smaller ball?"; "I can see you are upset because you can't...What would you like to do instead?"

Appendix 2. Resources for Mindfulness and Breathing Activities

Squish, Squash, Relax Activity for Younger Children



1. Take your shoes off and sit or lie down so you are comfortable
Relax
2. Close your eyes
3. Squish and squash your toes and feet
Relax
4. Squish & squash your leg muscles
Relax
5. Squish & squash your bottom muscles
Relax
6. Squish & squash your tummy muscles
Relax
7. Squish & squash your chest muscles
Relax
8. Squish & squash your hands
Relax
9. Squish & squash your arms muscles
Relax
10. Squish & squash your shoulders
Relax
11. Squish & squash your face muscles
Relax
12. Squish & squash your whole body

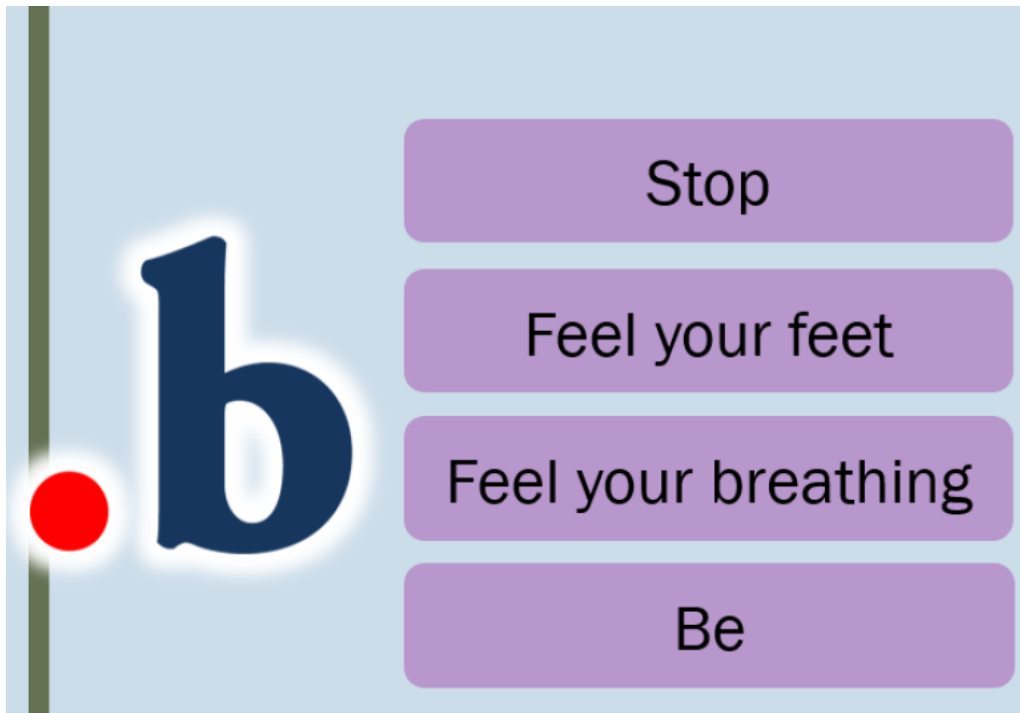


Stop and Breathe Activity for Older Children

During the day, there may not be time for a lengthy meditation or mindfulness activity. Instead, it may be possible to do a brief .b exercise to bring awareness back to now, help ground children and young people and develop recognition of what is happening in the moment.

.b is a simple four step exercise including:

- STOP what every you're doing and notice sensations and what is happening around you,
- FEEL YOUR FEET on the ground, let this anchor you,
- FEEL THE SENSATIONS OF BREATHING as it moves through the body,
- Practise BEING including relaxing into the present moment.



Other Resources


- The Whole Class Happy Pack provides examples of activities which can be used for primary age pupils. [Access the Whole Class Happy Pack here.](#)
- Dr Karen Treisman (Highly Specialist Clinical Psychologist) has made a number of videos available on her website which include exercises and activities to support calm and regulation:
 - Hand or star breathing- A video by Dr Karen Treisman introducing a brief breathing exercise called “hand breathing”. It can be used for children and for adults. [Click here for the Hand Breathing Relaxation and Regulation tool.](#)
 - Muscle tensing and releasing tool- A video by Dr Karen Treisman introducing a brief tension releasing exercise of tensing and relaxing one’s muscles. Suitable and adaptable for children and adults. [Click here for the Muscle Tensing and Releasing Tool.](#)


- Left and right body breathing - A video by Dr Karen Treisman introducing a breathing exercise which supports left and right breathing. Suitable for older children, teenagers, and adults. [Click here for an introduction video to a left and right breathing relaxation exercise.](#)
- Rhythm and butterfly breathing - A video by Dr Karen Treisman introducing how rhythm can be used to help to change one's regulation and arousal. Also, this introduces the butterfly hug move which activates both the left and right side of one's brain. Suitable and adaptable for children and adults. [Click here for an introduction to some rhythmic relaxation ideas including a butterfly hug.](#)
- Soaking in a positive moment - A video by Dr Karen Treisman introducing how we can find a happy, feel good, and positive memory and travel back to it, anchor on to it, and soak it in- including using all of our senses. Suitable and adaptable for children and adults. [Click here for a video on travelling back to and using a positive moment.](#)


Appendix 3. Example of Future Planning Activity for Young People


Developed by Darlington Educational Psychology Service

Vision Board

In the future I want to... 

To get there I'm going to need... 



Things I am already good at that will help me achieve this... 

Think about the people who love you. How can they help? 

Some helpful Apps and Websites!

Headspace (App for mindfulness)
www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc
www.kooth.com
www.nopanic.org

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA: @darlingtoneps

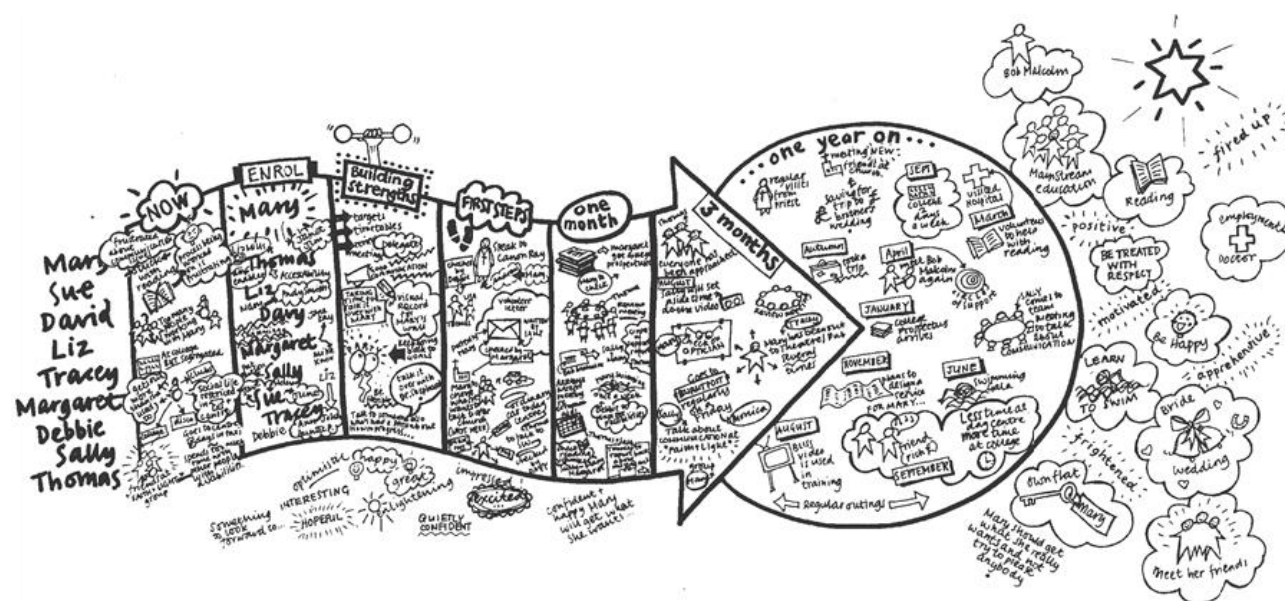
 

Appendix 5. 'Making Action Plans' (MAP) and 'Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope' (PATH) for KS3/4

Example MAP



Example PATH



MAPS and PATHS are person centred planning tools that can be used to support thinking and planning for futures of individual young people. Graphic facilitation is used to create a shared vision of a positive future and to make a start on working out what collaborative work and support needs to be undertaken to help the young person move towards their vision.

These sessions should be led by a trained facilitator who can guide young people, and their key supporters, to consider goals and how to move towards.

School staff should contact their link EP if you are interested in exploring possibilities for this type of planning for individual young people in your setting.