



Supporting pupils at transition stages

Who are these pupils?

Pupils who were at a 'transition' stage of school prior to Covid-19:

1. Pre-school pupils moving to Reception;
2. Some Year 2 pupils moving to Junior School;
3. Year 6 pupils moving to Secondary School;
4. Year 11 pupils moving to College, and;
5. Year 13 pupils finishing College.

What are the vulnerabilities of these pupils?

Moving to a new school can be unnerving for any child or young person.

Evidence suggests that particular groups of children and young people are likely to find a school transition challenging, such as, those with;

1. Special educational needs and disabilities;
2. Mental health needs such as anxiety;
3. Limited parental support;
4. Experiences of transient living, such as being in care;
5. Experiences of being bullied.

Psychological perspective

Change is something that happens to people, even if they don't agree with it. Transition, however, is internal, and is what happens in people's minds as they go through change. Change can happen very quickly, while transition usually occurs more slowly.

Bridge's model of transition highlights three stages of transition which people go through when they experience change:

1. Ending, losing and letting go

This first phase of transition is actually an ending: an end of 'who you used to be', where you might consider your losses and 'mourn' them, e.g. the final weeks/events of school.



2. The neutral zone

The neutral zone is the core of the transition process. It's an in-between time when the 'old you' is gone but the 'new you' isn't fully up and running, e.g. summer holidays and the first days/weeks/terms in the new setting.



3. The new beginning

A new beginning is when you can feel a new identity forming, e.g. after becoming settled in your new school.



As a result of the period of school restrictions due to Covid-19, a number of pupils may be missing out on 'Stage 1' of their school transition processes. Pupils may be positioned in the Stage 2 'neutral zone' earlier than is typical and expected, due to having had less time and opportunities to 'mourn' their previous school.

For example:

They may experience a reduction in time with staff or peers who they will be 'leaving' at the end of the school year.

1. Potential impact: earlier than anticipated 'goodbyes'.

Missing out on pre-planned activities and events to mark 'the end' of their experience at the setting. e.g. Sports days, Leaving assemblies, Fairs etc.

2. Potential impact: missing expected 'closure' and 'endings'

Missing out on pre-planned activities and events to prepare for transition to new school, e.g. Intake days at new school/college, class discussions around transition

3. Potential impact: missing expected 'preparation' for Stage 2 and 3.

What is some practical advice for supporting these pupils?

Stage 1: Ending, losing and letting go

1. **Take time to list all the ways in which your new school life might be different:** Think of all the changes you can, and any knock-on effects on other areas of your life. E.g. *"I won't see my old teachers", or "I might not see all my friends in every lesson anymore", or "I won't know the school layout and might need a map"*.
2. **Take the time to mourn losses:** Expect and accept signs of grieving and don't confuse them with failure. It is OK to feel angry, sad, frightened, angry and confused. Don't feel that you have to make the feelings go away. It's even better if you can share this with a friend who you're moving with, and/or friends/teachers you're not.
3. **Define what's over, and what isn't:** It's not all sad. Look at the big list of changes and group them into themes: interesting patterns might emerge. Some things might be 'gone' because they are bound to a time and place, but not everything has to end permanently, e.g. seeing friends from your old school. Some things just need to be changed to the new situation, e.g. making plans to meet friends after school/at clubs.
4. **Endings and celebrations:** Where any events to celebrate the end of your time at Infant/Primary/Secondary school/College have had to be cancelled or rearranged, find time and creative ways to still have these markers and celebrations, e.g. online 'parties', assemblies, sports events etc.



Stage 2: The neutral zone

1. **Accept that it's normal:** It's normal to not have everything worked out in a day, week, or even a month, e.g. it is normal to still get lost sometimes in a new school, to forget your books, or miss your old teachers etc., even after some time.
2. **Create a sense of achievement and movement:** The good thing about transitions is that they can be great for learning new things. You can define what success looks like and you can reward yourself when you achieve these goals. E.g. learning how to use new equipment in Science or Art lessons, learning new sports skills at clubs, etc.



Stage 3: The new beginning

3. **Picture the new beginning:** Visualisation is a powerful mental tool. Try to *picture* your new beginning and what it will feel to be part of it, e.g. picture your new school uniform, new stationary, school bag, new classrooms, clubs etc.
4. **Have a plan, milestones, and check-in moments:** When things start to change in your life it's important to create some 'achievement milestones', and build in time for reflection, e.g. see how things are going and how you are feeling at the end of every school day, week, half-term, term etc. You may notice a difference in how you feel!

General advice to support successful school transitions

At the earliest stage, identify those pupils who may be more at risk. Closely liaise with parents/carers to develop a plan for how to best prepare the young person.

To support the children through the stages described above:

1. Provide opportunities to talk about the transition and share any concerns.
2. Connect pupils who may be moving to same/settings.
3. Utilising a key adult approach may be helpful to enable the children to feel confident to share any worries or concerns they may have.
4. Arrange remote 'transition' days where the children can get to know the staff at their new setting. The use of maps and pictures could be helpful.
5. Carry out 'virtual' celebrations to mark the end of the school year.



Further resources

1. Bridges, W. (2017). *Managing Transitions: Making the most of change*. Perseus Books, LLC, a subsidiary of Hachette Book Group, Inc.
2. Mentally Healthy Schools support for transitions.
<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/risks-and-protective-factors/school-based-risk-factors/transitions/>
3. Activities and resources to support discussion about school transitions:
<https://www.tes.com/articles/transitions>
4. Tips to share with pupils:
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/moving-on-top-tips-for-pupils.pdf>
5. A video that can be shared with children:
<https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/find-your-feet-transitioning-to-secondary-school/>



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