

REASONS TO GET POSITIVE TRANSITIONS RIGHT

Transition can be "one of the most difficult in pupil's educational careers" (Zeedyk et al, 2003). Unsuccessful adaptation to secondary school can affect an individual's long term wellbeing and educational attainment. Pupils can feel left behind, misunderstood and at worst excluded if transitions do not go smoothly.

- Those who have suffered difficult experiences, or who have lower ability and lower self-esteem experience poorer school transitions and this can translate to likely levels of depression and lower attainment by age 15 (West, Sweeting & Young 2010).
- In primary school, gaps between a child's emotional and chronological age can be managed fairly readily. In secondary, the gap may become more evident due to the increased demands of secondary school (academically, relationally with multiple teachers, and socially). This can leave young people who may already have educational, social or emotional difficulties feeling as if they are left on the side-lines.
- Transitions can exacerbate feelings of loss and increase anxieties about possible abandonment for some children. Young minds might become overwhelmed without the resources to process what they are experiencing.
- Research highlights a dip in achievement and pupil wellbeing following transitions (McGee et al. 2003; Anderson et al. 2000).



WHY ARE POSITIVE TRANSITIONS IMPORTANT?

Positive and well supported transitions are important as they help young people to successfully adapt to a new environment and developmental phase. This enables them to:

- achieve academically
- have good social skills and able to build relationships
- be motivated and have interests
- have high self-esteem
- be engaged in school
- negotiate a more challenging school structure
- work to a different academic structure that has expectations of independent working
- experience curriculum continuity
- familiarise and immerse themselves in the culture of a new school
- familiarise themselves with different policies and reward structures
- be confident in social interactions with peers and teachers
- maximise their self-esteem and self-confidence
- successfully develop new friendships
- demonstrate resilience and growth in emotional intelligence
- have the opportunity to say their "goodbyes" and express their hopes and fears.

STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS TO SUPPORT TRANSITION

According to 'Inside I'm Hurting' (Louise Bomber), in depth, planned transitional support is essential when working with CYPs who have experienced trauma through their early years (Bomber, 2007).

The work should be carried out between the months of May and July, and in some cases, could even carry over into September.

Here are a few strategies that can be put into place to aid transition:



INFORMING THE NEW SCHOOL

- Send paperwork to the new school early so that they have time to implement support structures and adjust IDP already in place.
- A key worker should be identified in the new school. A key worker is an emotionally available adult who checks in with the pupil and who the pupil can approach with when they need support.
- Organise a meeting with both schools to discuss the child, around the beginning of May, to allow previous staff to pass on information such as the child's needs and support required. Let the child know this meeting has gone ahead in order to relieve worries. Pass on routines and rituals that have proven useful to new key workers.
- Facilitate the child and key worker meeting 4 or 5 times before July. This should be in addition to their year group visit. These visits could include following a map of the new school, meeting key staff, having lunch together, interviewing a present pupil of the new school, practicing the journey to and from the new school, going through the school diary to practice organising themselves.
- The new key-worker may want to give the child something to take away that is personalised e.g. a card to let them know they are looking forward to the child joining them in September.

SAYING GOODBYE

- Their current key worker may want to create a memory book that includes photos of significant people in school, comments written by staff, evidence of successes, a list of areas to improve, names of favourite books/activities/tasks, log of best memories and a timeline of future things to begin thinking of. This can be shown to their new key worker so they can get to know the child.

INVOLVING PARENTS

- Mentally Healthy Schools emphasise the importance of checking in with parents and carers in order to identify any transitional problems. By identifying these early schools and parents/carers can put support mechanisms in place to reduce any negative outcomes of the transition. This can also help to build a supportive relationship with the child's family, which can be useful if any other issues arise in the future.
- Look at tips for parents for more information on how schools can support parents with transition.

