

Parent Factsheet Transitions to School

Introduction

This factsheet identifies what a transition is and explores the various transitions that children may go through. We also look at what you can do to help your child with their transition into school.

Key points

The word transition (or in the plural form transitions) is a noun meaning: the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another. In this context it means children moving from being a pre-school child to being a school child. This is a transition for you as well as your child!

When your child first starts school, it may be the first time they have been away from you and it can be a stressful time for both of you. Alternatively your child may have already experienced a childcare setting. In either scenario there are things you can do to help your child with their transition into school.

There are many types of transitions in a child's life. There are big transitions such as moving house, starting childcare for the first time or starting school. Then there are smaller transitions during the day such as moving from an activity to snack or meal time. Whether big or small transitions can be stressful for children (and sometimes for you), helping your child cope with them by making transitions as smooth as possible will help their future resilience to change.

Your child may experience some level of anxiety at being separated from you. This is a normal stage of development for babies at around 8 to 14 months, but can also occur at different times in a young child's life. Your child may become distressed when you leave the room. These feelings are tied up with a very real fear that their parent or trusted adult will go away and not come back. This fear can feel like a physical pain. It is helpful to acknowledge this and provide your child with the knowledge that you will be coming back, or who will be collecting them from school each day.

All schools should have a plan for settling in new children. Good practice would mean that this gives you and your child the time you need to feel comfortable and confident in the new environment. Guidelines for The Early Years age group of children recognises the importance of transitions and supporting children through times of change.

Remember that each child is different and some will need longer to settle in. It is useful for you and your child to visit the school a few times, if possible, before your child is due to start. Ideally you would stay with your child on the first visit and then leave them with their new key person for a short period of time, to help build their confidence.

What does this mean for me?

New experiences coupled with your feelings about leaving your child in a new place can be a stressful time in a family's life. As a parent it is normal and acceptable to feel anxious but it is important not to pass these feelings on to your child.

It is important time is taken to plan carefully for any transitions or changes to ensure they happen as smoothly as possible. The school may already have systems in place, for example, planned times for settling visits and a new parents information pack. If your child attends a childcare setting there may already be links with the school here too and further plans for helping your child in their transition.

Ask any questions you may have, it is important you feel confident about your transition to school. Get to know your child's key person, they will be your first point of contact at school (refer to our factsheet about the Role of the Key Person for more information).

Share information about your child with their key person before they start, the more information you can give them about your child's likes, dislikes, development and routines, the more they will be able to support your child.

See it as an opportunity for you to make new friends, talking to other parents can help you feel reassured – you can also speak to them about where they are buying their children's uniforms (etc).

What can you do to support your child?

Talk about up and coming change with you child and approach transitions in a positive and exciting way. Help children express their feelings and emotions about the change and acknowledge their feelings.

Help your child celebrate memories of their current situation as well as look forward to the future.

On the Starting School Together project each child will be given a Jolfi Bear and a log book/diary for you to record what your child and Jolfi have done over the summer time. This might be your child drawing pictures, you or your child taking photographs or perhaps you capturing your child's thoughts and words by writing them down. The idea is then that your child can take Jolfi to school with them in September as a familiar item and then use the logbook to share their summer experiences with their key person in school.

A book of familiar photos that a child can take with them for the day may also help if your child is experiencing separation anxiety. Perhaps you could add laminated photos to a key ring for your child. Making a book about school on a settling visit may be possible.

It helps if you can say goodbye in a calm and brief manner and tell your child when you will be back. Never sneak out, as this can make your child feel abandoned.

Smile! You may feel like crying inside but try not to show it.

Talk about starting school in positive terms, as something exciting and enjoyable, even if your school days weren't exactly the best of your life. Don't belittle any fears your child may have, listen to them and talk to them about their feelings.

Read stories about starting school, there are many to choose from – there is a list at the end of this factsheet and you could also go to the local library and borrow books?

When choosing items of clothing or uniform for school think about clothes that are easy for them to pull on and off. Try and choose shoes with Velcro fastenings as this will make them feel more independent, as they won't need to ask for help tying the laces. If possible take your child with you when shopping for school clothes. If they have helped you to choose them they are more likely to be happy to wear them.

Your child will be staying for lunch at school. Talk about this with your child, will you be providing packed lunches or will they be having a school meal.

Some examples of books about starting school

At School. From the Oxford Reading Tree First Experience Collection (this has characters that may appear in your child's school reading books if your school uses this reading scheme) by Roderick Hunt and Alex Brychta

Going to School. From the Usborne Book of First Experiences by Anne Civardi and Stephen Cartwright

Harry and the Dinosaurs go to School by Ian Whybrow and Adrian Reynolds

I am Too Absolutely Small for school by Lauren Child

I want my Mummy by Tracey Corderoy

Lucy and Tom start school by Shirley Hughes

My First Day at Nursery School by Becky Edwards

