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# Supporting Your Child's Transitions

This toolkit is for parents or carers of a child with additional needs or a developmental disability.

Here are some strategies ***to support your child through times of change.***



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# What Does Transition Mean?



Transition essentially refers to **a change**. Commonly transitions involve moving between two or more different environments and situations, sometimes they alter our routines and can cause us to feel distressed. It is important that all children are supported during times of change.

As a parent/carer of a child with an additional need or developmental delay/disability, you may be familiar with some factors that make transitioning more difficult for your child. These may include:

Low tolerance for uncertainty

Rapid changes to sensory environment

Desire for sameness

Black and white thinking

Difficulty understanding concept of time

Can you think of any other factors which may make your child's transitions difficult?

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# Different Difficulties and Responses

<p><b>ADHD</b></p>	<p>A child with ADHD will often have difficulty turning attention to something they are expected to do rather than something they want to do. When they find something rewarding they are unlikely to want to change to doing something else. A child with ADHD may hyper focus on what they find rewarding.</p>
<p><b>Autism</b></p>	<p>A child with autism may have difficulties with transition as they often have cognitive inflexibility (that is their brain isn't very flexible in the way it works). A child with autism will often have hyper focused and specific interests. The world can be an incredibly confusing and overwhelming place so your child has a need for sameness and predictability. Their preference for routine and doing things the same way is adaptive; it's their way of coping. They will prefer to do things the same way that they are used to. Any change or deviation from routine disrupts their equilibrium, pulls the rug from under them.</p>
<p><b>Sensory Processing</b></p>	<p>Sensory processing is not a diagnostic term like ADHD or ASD, but your child may have Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). For any child with sensory processing difficulties the world can feel confusing and as if it is moving too fast. For a child that is easily stimulated, they may not realise it all the time, but they crave order and routine. Changing things too quickly can cause meltdowns.</p>
<p><b>Anxiety</b></p>	<p>A child with anxiety may have difficulties transitioning from A to B as they have a fear of the unknown or a fear of what is going to happen. Even talking about change may bring about anxious behaviour, psychosomatic symptoms (e.g. belly ache, heart racing, feeling faint) or panic attacks.</p>
<p><b>Attachment</b></p>	<p>Everyone has a different attachment style. These will result in different reactions from child to child. A child may have quite an anxious attachment where preparation is key, an avoidant attachment where small steps may help, or disorganised where task structure could be useful to support your child.</p>



# Transitions come in all Different Shapes and Sizes

We are living in a world of constant change, where transitions come (sometimes unexpectedly) in all different shapes and sizes. To help us, we can think of these transitions as 'longer term', 'medium term', and 'short term.'

## Short Term

*What do you want for your child now?*

For example:

- To go through the new door at school.
- To be able to wear a new coat as they have outgrown their old one.
- To be able to go without wearing a pad at night time.

## Medium Term

*What do you want for your child in 5 years?*

For example:

- To be able to go to a club or leisure activity.
- To accept your new partner.
- To play with other children their age.

## Longer Term

*What do you want for your child when they are older?*

For example:

- To go to college.
- To move into supported living.
- To be in a loving relationship.
- To transition from

services.

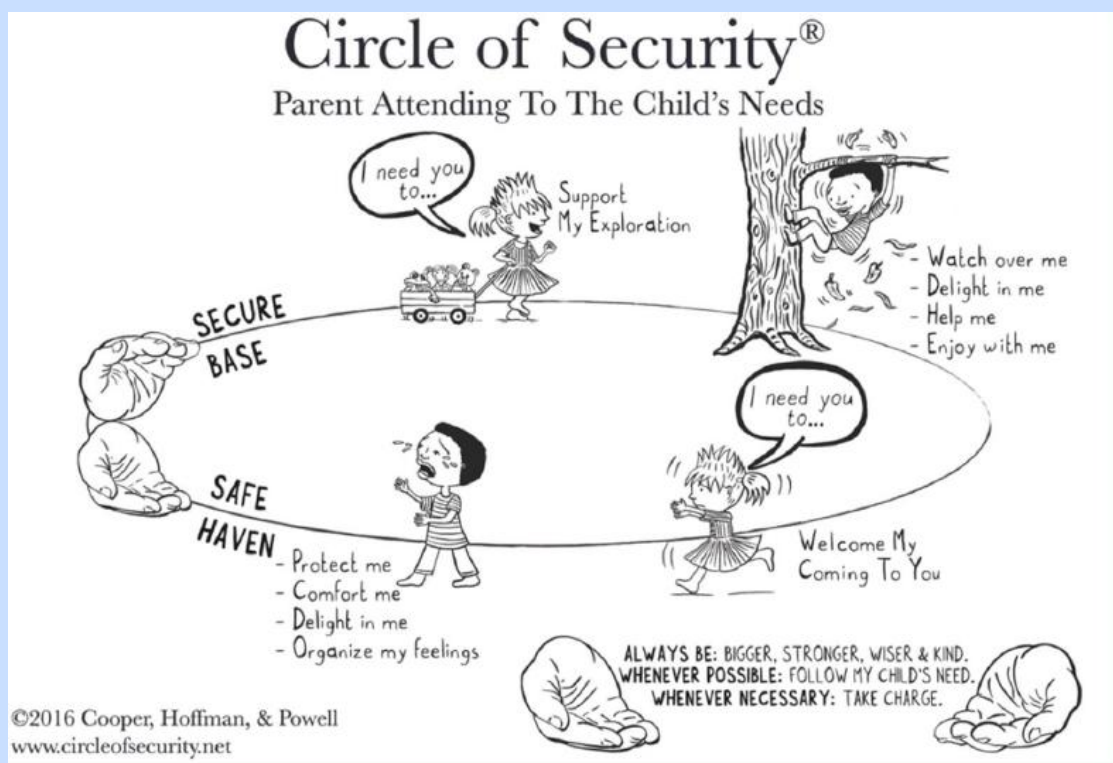
It's really important to be mindful that short, medium, and long term transitions are likely to be different for everyone. **No child or young person is the same.** Therefore, what may be a short-term transition for your child, could be a longer-term transition for another.

# Attachment and Transition

A child needs to feel confident to explore new situations, and know that they can come back to their parent/carer for support when needed. Our relationships with our children can be supported and strengthened to facilitate change and transitions.

## The Circle of Security™

The relationship between a parent/carer and a child can be described as a circle where the adult is used as a safe pair of hands or “safe base” that the child can come back to if they get upset or need comfort. This circle consists of ‘going out’ to explore and ‘coming in’ for support.



Going to school is an example of going out on the circle as it represents time away from the parent/carer exploring other relationships and creating new experiences. School may be particularly difficult for children who feel most comfortable when their caregiver is close by. Equally, some parents/cares might feel more comfortable when their child is with them and may therefore find the school day difficult too.

# School Transitions

Whether your child is starting at nursery, moving schools, transitioning from infants to juniors, or primary to secondary school, their transitions need to be supported. Your child may only be moving to the classroom next door but to them it may feel like a million miles away.



## Starting Primary School:

Starting primary school can be an exciting time but it can also be a big change for children and families. For some children it will be the first time they spend a prolonged period apart from their families. Children may experience anxiety at the prospect of this separation, which may be exacerbated if the child also perceives their caregivers to be feeling anxious around this separation too. Often separation anxiety is a temporary phase that passes with each positive experience apart, however you may find creating separation and reunion plans useful if separation anxiety is a difficulty for your family...

### When I Leave Mum or Dad

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Talk to your mum or dad, and together think of 5 things you could do when you say goodbye to them when you come to school.

1. I say goodbye to all family members and pets in the home
2. I cuddle or fist-bump with adults I am leaving
3. Mum gives me a hug and I kiss her on the cheek
4. Mum gives me something of hers to look after when I am in school
5. Dad gives me a final wave when I go through the school gate

This is a separation plan template. You can adapt it with your child to suit their likes and comforts.



This is a reunion plan. With your child, you could think of some comforting things they would like to do upon reunion with you.

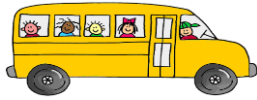
### When I See Mum or Dad Again

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Talk to your mum or dad, and together think of 5 things you could do when you see each other again after school.

1. Mum gives me a hug and I kiss her on the cheek
2. Dad asks me how my day was
3. I have special time in the park on the way home
4. I can have a special snack in the car on my way home
5. I can have some time playing on my iPad when I get home

# School Transitions



## Starting Secondary School:

Most children will feel a bit nervous, scared, and excited about transitioning to secondary school. Children may feel a bit sad about leaving their old school, some of their friends, and their old teachers. Children might be worried about the school being physically different and getting lost, or they may feel nervous about the change in workload or extra homework.

It is important to find out from your child if they are worried about transitioning to secondary school and what it is that is making them feel this way. When speaking to your child try to offer:

1

Validation: Try to listen to what your child is telling you, don't dismiss or diminish their feelings. Try to 'be with' them in their difficult emotions.

2

Modelling: Try to show your child how you manage your difficult feelings. Share how you feel and hope you cope. For example: *"I'm worried I won't know what to talk about when I see my friend X again, it would help me to practice what I will say."*

3

Curiosity: Try to explore possibilities with your child and learn together. Share some examples of how you could find out information. For example: *"I wonder if we went onto the school website would we be able to watch a virtual tour of the building?"*



# Useful Strategies to Manage Transitions

## Transitional Objects

Transitional objects are things that provide psychological comfort and security during times of change. They are things that remind children they are safe even when they are apart from their caregivers. Here are some transitional objects you could make together:

- **Matching bracelets/bands:** you could weave different coloured thread to represent different family members.
- **Key fobs:** you could put a memorable picture of you and your child in a key fob.
- **Pebbles:** you could go to the beach and pick some pebbles to paint. You could keep one and your child could keep another.

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## Preview and Countdown

Transitions can make a child feel anxious which may then lead to behaviours that challenge. For example, your child has been invited to a trampoline party but has never visited this particular venue before. Showing your child a preview of the venue, including the car-park, toilets, etc. may decrease their anxiety when it comes to the day of the party.



Your child may also benefit from a countdown calendar to help them prepare for the party and give them time to process that they will be going to a different trampoline park.



# Useful Strategies to Manage Transitions

## Social Stories

A social story is a tool that supports the exchange of information from one person to another. Social stories are often used to teach social skills such as identifying cues in a situation, understanding rules and expectations, or trying to see someone else's point of view. Social stories present information in a literal and concrete way and are often accompanied by pictures and symbols. Here is an example of a social story which may support your child's transition:

I am going to go back to school in September

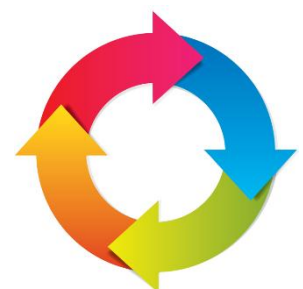
I will have a new teacher

I will learn new things

If I am worried I can talk to an adult

Going back to school will be ok

Having a specific symbol for **change** can be useful if you are unsure what a new environment/situation may look like for your child. At least, you can show your child the change symbol to prepare them that things may be different to what they are expecting. It can also be useful if a change occurs last minute!



# Useful Strategies to Manage Transitions

## Give your child control

Giving your child some control of the situation that is changing can really help them to feel more involved in the decision, and therefore less anxious.

However, for some transitions giving your child complete control may result in the transition not happening (e.g. going to school).

Therefore, instead of giving your child complete control you could give them some control. Using a 5-point scale like the one pictured below may aid communication between you and your child, help them to let you know how they are feeling, and give them some control of their situation.

How I am feeling about this change:



**1**

**Glitch**

This is just a glitch! I can fix this myself.



**2**

**Little Problem**

This is a little problem, I can make this change with a little reminder.



**3**

**Medium Problem**

This is feeling like a bit of a bigger change. I may need a little bit of help with this.



**4**

**Big Problem**

I think I will need a lot of help to make this change.



**5**

**Emergency**

This is a really big change or problem and I will definitely need some help from a grown up!!

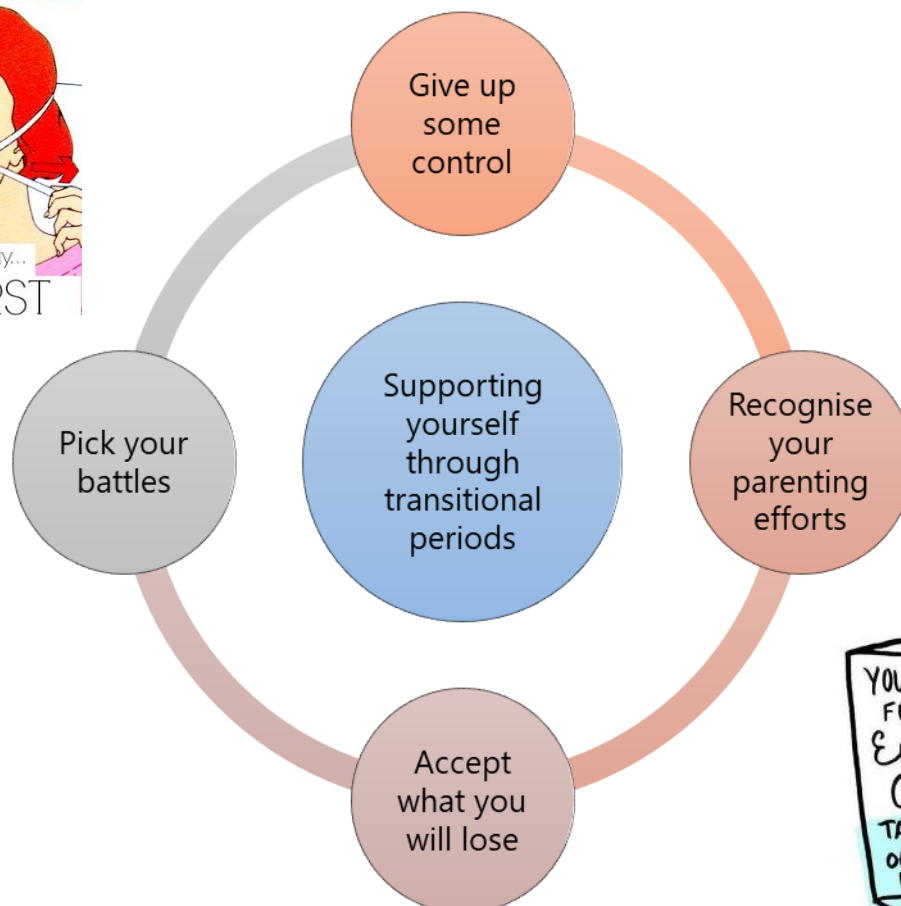
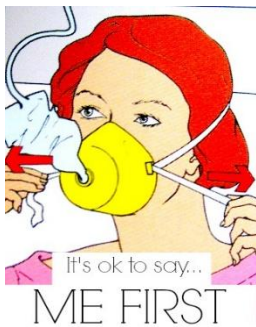
# Supporting Yourself with Transition

It is equally, if not more important to think about your needs when it comes to your child's transition. What are the aspects of this transition that you are going to find personally difficult and how can you start preparing for it? We know that children can pick up on parental cues and so if you are feeling anxious or sad about their transition, it may impact on how they feel about it too!

Spend a few moments thinking about what you will find difficult about your child's transition?

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## Useful Resources and Information

**Self-Help Apps:** Self-help apps can be a useful way to access support. The following apps may be helpful in managing anxiety around transitions.



**The Autism Sound Walk:** Young people with ASD may find transitioning to secondary school difficult due to all the unfamiliar sounds in their new environment. The Autism Sound Walk (available here: <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/misc/866/soundwalk/>) is designed to help young people feel familiar with the sounds they may hear around school.

Mind Cymru	02920 395 123
Samaritans	116 125
Young Minds	0808 802 5544

**Children's Centre Psychology Team:** If you require further support please use the contact details overleaf to contact the team in your designated Children's Centre.

**GP:** If you are concerned about yourself or a member of the family you can access support from your local GP.

**Charities:** Charity organisations such as Mind Cymru, Samaritans and Young Minds may also be able to provide you with support, advice and resources.

## Contact

This toolkit was created by the **Children's Centre Psychology** team at Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB).

**Your feedback is important to us!** If you would like to tell us what you thought about this self-help toolkit, please get in touch with us using the contact details below to speak to a member of the team at your local children's centre. We would love to hear from you!

Additionally, if you need any help or support with using or accessing these resources, please do not hesitate to contact us with the below details.

<b>Serennu Children's Centre</b> 01633 748023	<b>Nevill Hall Children's Centre</b> 01873 732713
<b>Caerphilly Children's Centre</b> 02920 867447	

Please contact the team if you would be interested in any of our other toolkits on the following topics –

Understanding and  
Managing Behaviour

Building Resilience

Supporting Siblings

Friendships

Promoting Sleep

Managing Anxiety