

Supporting Your Child Through Class or School Transitions

Helping children adjust smoothly to new educational environments

Coffee mornings Pre Form



Understanding and Supporting School Transitions

Welcome and Aims: Understanding School Transitions



Emotional Impact of Transitions

School transitions involve emotional challenges including loss, uncertainty, and adjustment for children and families.

Psychoeducation for Parents

Understanding children's psychological experiences helps parents respond with empathy rather than just reassurance.

Practical Strategies for Support

Concrete actions and routines build predictability, emotional safety, and confidence during school transitions.

Empowering Parents

Equipping parents with tools and realistic expectations fosters security and confidence in children.

Why Transitions Are Hard for Children



Disruption of Familiarity

Children rely heavily on routine, predictability, and known relationships to feel secure.

Transitions disrupt children's routines, relationships, and environments, provoking stress and feelings of loss.

Emotional Complexity

Children may experience a mix of excitement, anxiety, sadness, and uncertainty. These emotions can coexist, which may be confusing for both children and adults. For example, a child might say they are excited about a new school/class while also showing increased worry at bedtime.

Support and Understanding

Empathy and structured reassurance help children adjust, building confidence and easing transitions.

Recognising Signs a Child May Be Struggling



Behavioral Signs of Distress

Children do not always have the language to explain how they feel about a transition, so distress often shows up through behaviour. Such as withdrawal, irritability, or emotional dysregulation.

Physical and Emotional Indicators

Headaches and stomach aches often link to anxiety, alongside changes in sleep, appetite, or energy.

Importance of Supportive Responses

Rather than asking, “How do I stop this behaviour?” it can be more helpful to ask, “What is my child trying to tell me?” Observing patterns and timing can offer clues about what aspects of the transition are most challenging.

The Parent's Role in Supporting Transitions



Emotional Safety and Validation

Parents provide emotional safety by listening, validating feelings, and reassuring children's emotions during transitions.

Predictability through Routines

Maintaining familiar routines like morning and bedtime helps children feel secure amid change.

Co-Regulation and Calm Modeling

Parents model calm responses to help children manage strong emotions until they can self-regulate.

Advocacy and Collaboration

Sharing information with school staff ensures consistent support and helps children adapt smoothly.

CO-REGULATION

BEFORE you try to speak to the "thinking" part of someone's brain you MUST....

Third: We can support the child to reflect, learn, remember, articulate and become self-assured.

REASON



Second: We must relate and connect with the child through an attuned and sensitive relationship.

RELATE



First: We must help the child to regulate and calm their fight/flight/freeze responses.

REGULATE



Heading straight for the reasoning part of the brain with an expectation of learning will not work well if the child is dysregulated and disconnected from others.
Dr. Bruce Perry, Child Trauma Academy

Tips for Providers, Parents and Caregivers

Modeling Regulation

Demonstrate calm behavior:

- Practice slow breathing.
- Maintain a steady tone of voice.
- Keep a relaxed posture.
- Sit with them.



Grounding and Breathing Exercises

Provide strategies they can practice on their own at home, school, etc.:

- Practice deep breathing techniques.
- Use grounding techniques that engage their senses: "What can you see, hear, or feel right now?"



Sensory Regulation Support

Provide sensory strategies to help them regulate.

- Teach them deep pressure exercises on hands, feet, and other joint areas.
- Engage in proprioceptive activities, like jumping or pushing.



Creating a Co-regulating Environment

Consider these when creating a safe space:

- Reduce overwhelming stimuli and introduce calming sensory elements (soft lighting, calm music).
- Maintain clear routines and expectations to create a sense of safety.
- Designate a quiet space to go to with calming objects when feeling overwhelmed.
- Use listening therapies like the Safe and Sound Protocol to help regulate the nervous system.



Verbal and Non-verbal Communication

Pay attention to your body language.

- Use a calm, steady voice, and gentle eye contact to convey safety.
- Provide physical reassurance if appropriate, such as a gentle hand on the back or sitting close by.



Special thanks to Daphne Boucher BA, MScOT, OT Reg.

Visit unyte.com for more educational resources and to learn more about therapeutic tools for nervous system regulation.

Preparing Your Child Before the Move



Familiarising Environment

Visiting the new school and identifying key locations, walking routes, toilets or playgrounds, and meeting staff can all help.

Visual Aids and Planning

Taking photographs of important areas and looking at them together at home can reinforce familiarity. Asking the school for timetables, maps, or handbooks in advance allows children to mentally rehearse what their days will look like. Parents can also talk through practical details such as uniform, lunchtime routines, and who to ask for help.

Balanced Preparation

Preparation should be balanced; too much information at once can feel overwhelming. Spreading conversations over time and checking in with how the child is feeling.

Helping Children Feel More in Control



Offering Choices

Small decisions, such as choosing a school bag, lunchbox, or stationery, allow children to feel involved and valued

Practicing Routines

Rehearsing practical activities like morning routines builds confidence through familiarity.

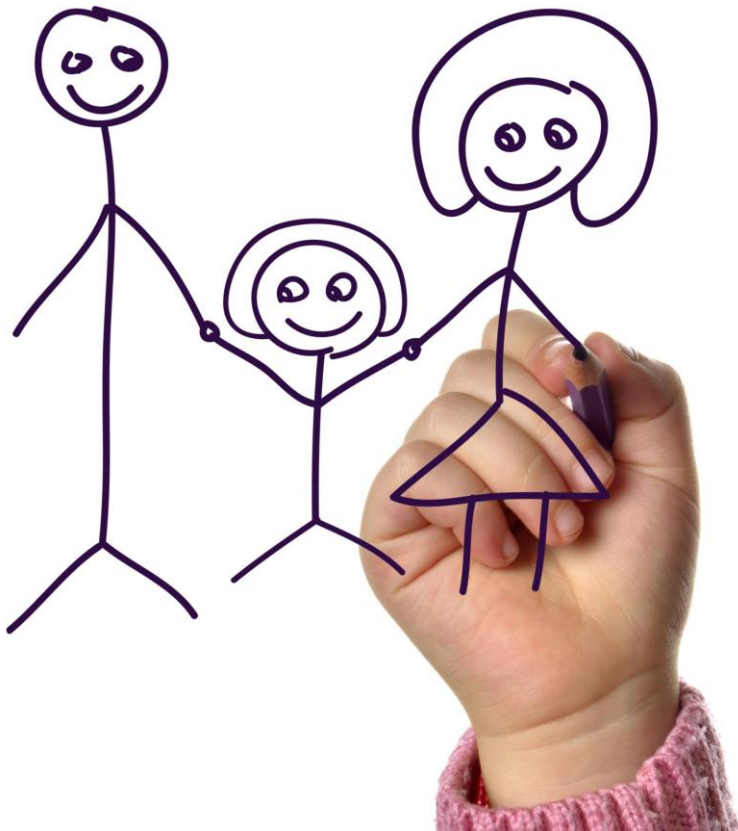
Role-Playing Scenarios

Role-playing common situations like asking a teacher for help or finding where to line up prepares children for real-life challenges and reduces anxiety.

Encouraging Confidence and Resilience

Reinforcing past successes and celebrating effort fosters resilience and a growth mindset.

Supporting Emotional Regulation at Home



Consistent Routines

Consistent routines around sleep and mealtimes provide stability and predictability for children during transitions.

Naming and Normalising Emotions

Helping children recognise that feelings are acceptable and temporary. For example, saying “It makes sense to feel worried about something new” validates emotions without amplifying them.

Positive Encouragement and Connection

Praise and encouragement should focus on effort and coping rather than achievement, reinforcing the idea that trying is what matters.

Supporting Adjustment After the Move



Allow Time to Adjust

Children need time to adjust after a school transition, and experiencing ups and downs is normal during this period.

Maintain Routines and Encouragement

Parents can support by keeping routines steady and offering encouragement without overwhelming questioning.

Encourage Social Participation

Participation in clubs, activities, or playdates helps children build social connections and feel belonging.

Early Support and Patience

Raising concerns early with school staff ensures timely help, and patience supports gradual confidence building.

Key Take-Home Messages for Parents



Emotional Impact Awareness

Recognising school transitions as emotionally significant helps parents respond with empathy and support their children effectively.

Preparation and Predictability

Maintaining routines and preparing children for change reduces anxiety and builds resilience during transitions.

Collaboration is Key

Working closely with schools and support services ensures parents are not alone in managing transitions.

Encouraging Connection and Communication

Fostering open communication and emotional validation helps children feel understood and capable during change.

Coffee mornings- Post forms

