

PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITION: SUPPORTING CARE EXPERIENCED CHILDREN

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS AND CARERS *Herefordshire Virtual School*

Transitions are an important part of anyone's life, and especially so for children who are care experienced, which includes children looked after (CLA) and who have been previously looked after (PCLA). Many care experienced children experience multiple episodes of instability, loss and change in their lives which can impact on how they feel about transition to secondary school. Most children will adapt successfully to transitions between settings, but some will find these changes more challenging due to their past experiences, high levels of anxiety, unstable sense of belonging and difficulties forming trusting relationships.

Whilst many children worry about similar things at secondary school (most frequently bullying, routines, environments, social issues/friendships, workload, homework and getting lost) more vulnerable children, including those who are care experienced, may have additional worries and therefore need additional support and planning around their transition.

KEY MESSAGES

- An enhanced transition will be needed for all vulnerable children, including those who are care experienced.
- Managing relationships is critical – supporting children to let go of old ones and form new ones.
- Building resilience is important.
- Early planning is needed so any potential difficulties can be identified and support put in place.
- Good information sharing (both prior to and after transition) is necessary and this should involve all involved, including the child themselves.
- Support should be individualised – there is no 'one size fits all' transition package.
- Liaise with the Virtual School Team – they can advise and support around school transitions.

WHAT CAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS DO?

- **Information transfer** - Ensure all relevant information is sent to secondary schools in good time, well before the end of the Summer term. This should include information about the child's background and recent significant events, as well as their attainments, friendships and any support that has been in place.
- **Designated Teacher** – Ensure the secondary school Designated Teacher for Looked After Children (DLACT) is aware of any care experienced children transitioning to them and is invited to the Summer Term PEP review..
- **Pupil Passport** - Ensure the information sent to secondary schools includes a 'One Page Profile' or 'Pupil Passport' whenever possible, which highlights a young person's specific strengths and needs 'in a nutshell'. This should be shared with all secondary school staff. Ensure pupils contribute to this.

- **Talk** - Devote time in the summer term to talking about secondary school in positive terms - debunking myths and solving problems with humour. Circle Times can be a useful format for these discussions.
- **Structured transition** - Work through a transition preparation programme in collaboration with the secondary schools pupils will be moving to. Perhaps ask children to make a 'fact file' about their new school.
- **Resilience and organisational skills** - Run a resilience programme such as 'Friends for Life' (recommended by the World Health Organisation) – see Appendix 1 and provide activities to improve executive functioning skills – see Appendix 1. The 'Walk Tall' programme is used by some Herefordshire schools to prepare children by boosting their confidence prior to transition.
- **Visits** - Provide extra visits to secondary schools for young people who might find the transition more difficult, including care experienced children and those with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND).
- **Transport** – Talk to children about how they will be getting to and from their new schools. The Transport Service are able to visit schools to talk to Year 6 classes about 'safer transport'.
- **Anxiety & EBSA** (Emotionally-Based School Avoidance) - Ensure secondary schools are aware of any highly anxious pupils who may struggle to attend school due to anxiety or other emotionally based factors or who have a history of non-attendance.
- **Time** - Support pupils to understand the passage of time and prepare for change, such as marking of days on a wall calendar, incidental comments such as 'so you have two weeks left in Miss Jones class', 'tomorrow is your last PE lesson at this school', etc.
- **Goodbyes** - Ask pupils which adults they would like to say goodbye to and let them do this. Allow pupils to make cards for any adults they want to and help them to remember something they have enjoyed doing with them (they could write in the card 'I really enjoyed it when we...'). Ask key adults to make cards for pupils they have worked closely with and/or had strong relationships with.
- **Memories** - Take photos around the primary school to make into a memory book about the child's 'old' school.
- **Links** - Facilitate staying in touch for those children who would like to. This reinforces the message that the pupil still exists to the adults in the primary school, even though they don't meet every day, for example postcards, occasional visits back, etc.

WHAT CAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS DO?

- **Designated Teacher** – Ensure the Designated Teacher for Looked After Children (DLACT) is aware of any care experienced children transitioning to them from primary schools. The DЛАCT should attend the Summer Term PEP review for CLA.
- **Visits** - Ensure pupils have extra familiarisation with their new school via lots of visits. *One visit will not be enough for most vulnerable children.* Key secondary school staff should also visit the child in their primary setting. Facilitate visits by Year 7 secondary pupils to primary feeder schools if possible, to have informal discussions with Year 6 pupils.
- **Parent and carer events** – Ensure that carers are invited to any Open Evenings or transition events. (Check with the primary school who should be invited.)
- **Summer School** – Specifically invite all vulnerable children to Summer School activities, if available.
- **Safety walk** – Some care experienced children feel unsafe in new and unfamiliar environments due to their previous experiences. They may need a tour of their new school with safety specifically in mind – having fire doors, extinguishers, safe spaces, etc. pointed out to them.

- **Photos and videos** - Allow the child to take photos of parts of their new school and make a scrap book to look at before their move. A video tour is also a good idea.
- **Key areas** - Point out the toilets, fire escapes, first aid room, pastoral base, etc.
- **Map** - Provide a map of the school and the young person's timetable for familiarisation over the summer holiday.
- **Key adult** - Nominate a key adult in school whose responsibility it is to guide and advocate for the child during and following the transition. Arrange for them to meet the child in Year 6.
- **Buddies** – Allocate buddies in the current Year 7 to vulnerable children. Arrange for them to meet and arrange how they can meet and/or contact each other once the new school year starts.
- **Safe spaces** – Identify the areas or rooms where the child will be able to go if they need time away from others during the school day, or to regulate. Explain how these spaces are accessed.
- **Rules** – Ensure children know what the school rules are, especially around mobile phone use.
- **Sounds** - Record key sounds if possible, such as bells and hand driers in the toilets, as these can cause anxiety in some children.
- **Arrivals** - Ensure arrival routines are clear - what time do most children arrive, what door do they use, where do they go, what do they do with their coat and bag?
- **Welcome** - Nominate staff members to welcome students; meet and greet, hold check-ins etc.
- **Lockers** – If possible allocate a locker on the edge of a block rather than in the middle (to avoid the child being squashed between lots of other children).
- **Seating** - Ensure teachers are aware of any particular seating needs, such as near the door, at the front, at the back, etc.
- **Toilets** - Ensure the child knows where their toilets are and when they are allowed to use them. Let the child know what do if they need to use the toilet during a lesson. Consider toilet passes where necessary.
- **Snack/break times** - What time are they, do they bring their own snack or buy it, what snacks are allowed, what do most children do?
- **Lunchtime** - What time is this, where do pupils usually go, is there a quiet area, if a canteen is used how do they pay, where do they go to eat?
- **Equipment** - What do they need and are there lockers to store items during the day?

WHAT CAN PARENTS AND CARERS DO?

- **Be positive** - Talk in positive terms about the move and highlight all the positive aspects of secondary school. Discuss it in terms of a 'fresh start' for children who have not experienced a positive time at primary school.
- **Normalise worries** - Normalise and accept your child's worries – for example saying 'I can see you are worried about getting lost. Lots of children feel like that. Let's see what we can do to help you feel less worried'. Don't say 'Don't worry you'll be fine'.
- **Find solutions** - Look together for solutions to minimise any worries where possible. Discuss strategies for your child if the 'worry' does happen. Contact the new school to help you with this if necessary.
- **Convey belief** - Help your child to see that they have coped with other changing situations in the past and you have confidence they will be able to cope with this too.
- **Be aware** - Anticipate some changes in behaviour, and sometimes a regression to some previous behaviours.

- **Provide calm** - Keep home life as calm and predictable as possible, especially in the weeks prior to the transition.
- **Familiarise** - Walk past or drive to the new school to familiarise your child with the building and local area.
- **Practise travel** - Practise catching the bus if this is what your child will be expected to do. Practise walking if that is what they will do.
- **Organise** - Help your child develop independence skills by encouraging them to organise themselves with small aspects of their day.
- **Be practical** - Look at and talk about the floor plans / time-tables / key staff provided by the new school.
- **Help with money** - Help your child budget for lunch and drinks if they will be using a cafeteria in school.
- **Uniform** - Ensure your child has the correct uniform and the various equipment stated on any paperwork sent by secondary schools. Ensure you know what school uniform is worn by other children already there, as well as considering the official school uniform list (they are not always the same). Wash any new uniform so it feels comfortable.
- **Shoes** - Think about school shoes and consider allowing them to wear their old comfortable pair to start with if they still fit and are in line with the new school rules. If new, allow them to wear them in before the first day.
- **Phones** – Make sure your child knows what to expect regarding rules around their mobile phone during the school day.

Amanda Cotton

Educational Psychologist with Herefordshire Virtual School

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*With thanks to Ursula Beck - Educational Psychologist:
'Transitions for Children in Care' powerpoint 2021*

APPENDIX 1 - Further transition resources for schools

*Comprehensive guidance for CLA and PLAC from Ealing LA:
[Ealing virtual school guidance on transition of looked after children and previously looked after children \(egfl.org.uk\)](https://www.egfl.org.uk/transition-of-looked-after-children-and-previous-looked-after-children)

*Designated Teacher for CLA guidance from Somerset LA:
[Supporting-Transitions-for-Children-Looked-After.pdf \(somersetvirtualschool.co.uk\)](https://www.somersetvirtualschool.co.uk/Supporting-Transitions-for-Children-Looked-After.pdf)

Anna Freud Centre teacher toolkit for Y6 to Y7:
[Mental health animation toolkit for teachers and schools | Young people mental health \(annafreud.org\)](https://www.annafreud.org/mental-health-animation-toolkit-for-teachers-and-schools)

Young Minds transition resource:
[School Resources to Help With Transitions | Mental Health | YoungMinds](https://www.youngminds.org.uk/school-resources/help-with-transitions)

Mentally Healthy Schools guidance:
[Transitions : Mentally Healthy Schools](https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/transitions)

Teacher programme: Supporting Successful Transition from Primary to Secondary School:
[Supporting Successful Transition from Primary to Secondary School: A p \(routledge.com\)](https://www.routledge.com/Supporting-Successful-Transition-from-Primary-to-Secondary-School-A-Programme-for-Teachers/9781315205000)

Pupil workbook for primary to secondary transition:
[LAC Virtual School Transition Pack Transition Workbook for 11yr olds.pdf \(egfl.org.uk\)](https://www.egfl.org.uk/transition-workbook-for-11-year-olds)

Autism Education Trust guidance for Y6-7 transition:
[Supporting learners with autism during transition \(autismeducationtrust.org.uk\)](https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/)

One Page Profile templates:
<http://www.sheffkids.co.ok/adultssite/pages/onepageprofilestemplates.html>

Friends for Life resilience programme:
[Friends Resilience](https://www.friendsforlife.org.uk/)

Developing Executive Functioning skills:
[Activities Guide: Enhancing & Practicing Executive Function Skills \(harvard.edu\)](https://www.harvard.edu)

APPENDIX 2 – Further transition resources for parents/carers:

Wellbeing during transition for parents and carers:
[Supporting children's transition to secondary school | Childrens mental health and wellbeing in schools | Anna Freud Centre](https://www.annafreud.org/transition-of-looked-after-children-and-previous-looked-after-children)

Adoption-UK webinar on primary to secondary transition (30 minutes):
<https://youtu.be/uX02NJ6QQAE>

APPENDIX 3 – Collated responses from survey of Herefordshire schools (May 2021) (See separate document)