

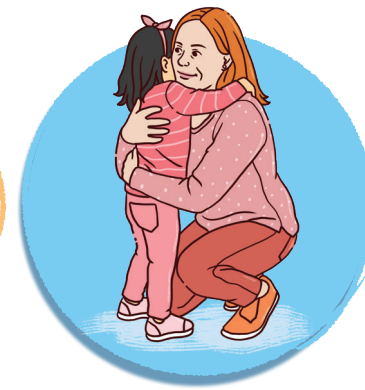
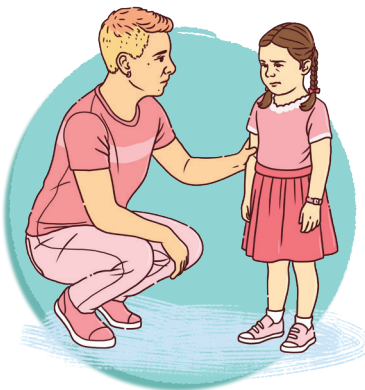
# Helping Your Child Cope with Transitions: A Support Snippet for Parents

## Why might your child struggle with transitions?

Children with a variety of different needs (such as Autism, ADHD, anxiety and emotional difficulties) may struggle with transitions. They may find a variety of different transitions challenging, including day-to-day ones (e.g. leaving the house or switching activities) or major life transitions (e.g. starting school or moving house).

Children can struggle with transitions because:

- They rely on **rigid routines** to help them feel more 'in control' while navigating a world that feels unpredictable. Transitions can shatter these rigid patterns that they are expecting.
- They struggle to understand the **sequence of activities** in a day, so they are unprepared for sudden changes.
- They may not understand **social cues**; therefore, they might struggle to understand what is expected of them when transitioning between settings.
- They may need **extra time to process** the steps that are involved in making a certain transition.
- They often **hyperfocus** while enjoying particular activities, so they can find the transition to a less-rewarding activity upsetting.
- They may struggle with **sensory changes** that are experienced alongside certain transitions (e.g. leaving a peaceful park and suddenly walking into a busy, loud cafe).
- They may already be feeling particularly **anxious** and so certain transitions may heighten that anxiety even more, leading to overwhelm.
- They may have **low self-esteem**; therefore, they may worry about failing to achieve certain things as a consequence of transitions.



## Signs your child is struggling with transitions:

emotional dysregulation, e.g. your child gets very teary or experiences a meltdown

becomes very quiet and withdrawn

experiences feelings of anxiousness

may become overly clingy

may resist changes to their routine, even small changes

may try to avoid a certain transition, e.g. by running away or freezing in one spot, maybe dropping to the floor

engages in repetitive behaviours to regulate themselves, e.g. they might start flapping their hands or rocking their body

might hurt themselves or others

repeat phrases or words

can take a very long time to adjust to changes in routine, e.g. takes a long time to settle when first arriving at school or nursery

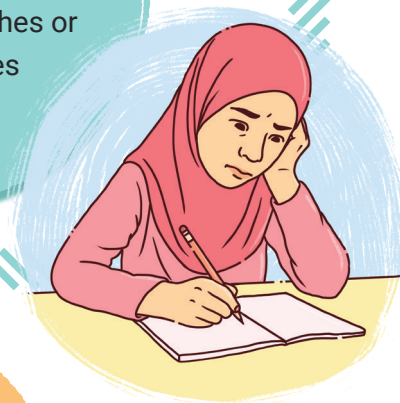
complaints of physical symptoms such as headaches or tummyaches

become less enthusiastic about certain activities that they previously enjoyed

finds it hard to concentrate or maintain attention while completing certain activities

struggles to fall asleep at bedtime, or wakes up frequently in the night

a change in appetite, e.g. they eat more or less than they used to



## Supporting your child with transitions:



**Prepare** your child for transitions by talking about them ahead of time. This way, transitions aren't sprung upon them without warning.

For day-to-day transitions, consider the use of a **visual timer** so that your child knows how long they have left until they need to switch from one activity to another.

Display daily **routine boards** in your home (e.g. a now and next board) to help your child transition between different activities. For larger periods of unstructured time (e.g. during a school holiday), try using a weekly planner.

If your child is experiencing a transition where they will **meet new people**, it's a good idea to introduce your child to them ahead of time.

You could **take photos** to help your child prepare for a particular transition. For example, you could show them photos of a place you are going on a family outing or show them photos of the staff who will be working alongside them in their new class.

Read **social stories** to help your child learn more about bigger transitions where they may encounter new experiences (e.g. starting school or going on holiday).

During longer periods of transition (e.g. during a summer holiday or while you're on a family holiday), try to adopt new, **predictable routines**. For example, try to keep mealtimes and bedtimes consistent.

Assure your child that you are always there if they need to **talk about any worries** concerning a transition. Encourage them to ask questions to learn more about a particular transition. If you don't know the answers to some of their questions, help your child seek the answers.

Support your child with transitions in educational settings by ensuring that you **pass on relevant information** to members of staff. This might include effective strategies that help to make your child feel calm and happy or copies of important paperwork.

## Supporting your child with transitions:

If your child feels anxious about a particular transition, encourage them to engage in **calming activities** such as deep breathing exercises, yoga or mindfulness colouring.

Where possible, try to **keep routines consistent between settings**. For example, if your child uses sensory toys to help regulate their emotions at home, see if they can use the same items at school.

After a major transition has taken place, revisit how your child is feeling. Talk about **copng strategies** that helped them – strategies your child may want to try again in the future.

**Prepare yourself for changes**, so that you can be a calm presence when helping them through a transition. Big transitions (such as moving house) can be overwhelming for the whole family, so be open with your child about feelings of nervousness and coping strategies that you find helpful. This may encourage your child to consider what works well for them.

Encourage your child to prioritise their own personal **wellbeing** by exercising regularly and eating a balanced diet. If your child feels happy and healthy, they will be in a much stronger place mentally when attempting to combat any feelings of anxiety surrounding transitions.

Offer plenty of **praise** when your child does their best to cope with particular transitions – positive words of encouragement will really help to boost their confidence and self-esteem.



We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. As far as possible, the contents of this resource are reflective of current professional research. However, please be aware that every child is different and information can quickly become out of date. The information given here is intended for general guidance purposes only and may not apply to your specific situation.

These resources are those which we have generally found to be of benefit to learners with SEND. However, every learner's needs are different and so these resources may not be suitable for your learner. It is for you to consider whether it is appropriate to use these resources with your learner.

This resource is provided for informational and educational purposes only. As far as possible, the contents of this resource are reflective of professional research as of July 2025. This resource is not intended to be used in an emergency and should not replace professional training. If you require mental health advice, you should contact a suitably qualified mental health professional.