

**Transition and teachers/teaching staff**

Transition from primary school to high school presents a challenge to young people and parents/carers alike. It is a time when the development of a young person is important, and it affects young people biologically, socially and cognitively.

Adolescence brings a difficult time of balance due to the conflict of physical capability and socially allowed independence, and many behavioural/emotional changes at this time are due to brain changes as opposed to hormonal issues.

At this time young people are also going through a period of neurological development and they are vulnerable to changes in their behaviour- positively and negatively.

 **A change in neuro structure can lead to:**

* **Increased irritability** – anhedonia (no pleasure in anything) and risk taking behaviour
* **Reward processing** – young people are motivated by rewards and praise, rather than the risk of a consequence.
* **Different decision making capacity** – more able to reflect on similar situations they have experienced before
* **Synaptic pruning** results in a loss of paths – these pathways are within the brain and link emotions and thoughts. If a child witnesses trauma on a regular basis this path will be very strong, as opposed to a child who is praised regularly where this pathway would be strong.
* **Facial emotion, considering the perspectives of others** and empathy are not fully developed until adulthood
* **Peer relationships and acceptance** become very important at this stage.

**There are 2 types of transition:**

**Discontinuous** – this is a sudden change where there has been no opportunity for planning.

**Focal** – this is where change can be planned and is the only change going on within a young person’s life.

Ideally the transition to high school should be a **FOCAL** change so that the young person feels secure in the other areas of their lives, such as at home.

**Transition- what the research tells us:**

* Impact on child, staff and parents
* Anxiety in all these groups
* Possible drop in self-esteem in yr 7 group
* Possible drop in educational attainment in yr 7 group
* Increase in mental health referrals in yr 7 group
* A decrease in subjective emotional wellbeing is apparent between yr 6 and yr 7
* It is the responsibility of parents/carers and staff from both of the schools involved

**A positive transition can lead to:**

* Increased friendships
* Positive self-esteem
* School motivated
* School interested
* Confidence building
* Adaptation to new routines
* Academic success at own level

**A less positive transition can lead to:**

* Depression
* Eating disorders
* Substance misuse
* Risky/anti-social behaviour
* Reduced academic achievement
* School refusal

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| What is important to the young person? | What may worry a young person? |
| If new people are involved “will I be liked?”  Having friends and siblings at a different school or in another class  The distance from school to home  What facilities/provisions the school has | Leaving friends and teachers  Bullying  Making new friends  Getting lost  Amount of homework  Older and bigger children  The school being bigger |
| What is important to parents/carers? | What parents/carers think the school should provide |
| Distance to school and travel  Ratings/standards of the school  Do they have siblings at the same school  That is the choice of the child  Where their child’s friends are going | Help talking about their feelings  Homework  Prompting to remember their own equipment  Help to make new friends |

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| Physical symptoms of anxiety | Emotional symptoms of anxiety |
| Sweating  Chest pain  Pacing  Hand wringing  Headaches  Stomach issues  Trouble breathing  Insomnia  Self-harm  OCD behaviours- checking doors, washing hands | Overthinking  Memory loss  Need for control  Avoidance  Irritability  Needing lots of reassurance  Constant worry  Panic attacks  Problems concentrating  Fear of being alone |

Worry and anxiety are normal emotions and most young people will experience these to some degree when moving schools.

If the worries are a big change for the young person, if they last for longer than a few weeks and if they impact the young person doing normal day to day things then advice should be sought.

**Strategies to help a worried young person:**

* **Distraction** – this differs for each young person, it could be reading, watching something of interest, colouring, going for a walk, ringing someone for a chat
* **Worry box** – this can be an empty tissue box; a young person could write their worries and then post the worry into the box. For some young people they would feel it has gone once it has been posted, other young people may want an adult to read the worries and discuss them
* **Times for worry** – set aside a time each day when the young person can talk about anything they are worried about
* **Breathing exercises** – these can be found on apps such as Calm or Headspace and often include breathing in and out for certain counts
* **Mindfulness** – this is beneficial for any young person; it can include listening to music or guided stories. Again the apps Calm and Headspace have lots of mindfulness activities
* **Exercise** – the endorphins released are good for raising the mood and reducing anxiety
* **Preparation** – talk the young person through the first few days, what to expect, how they will travel etc.
* **Reassurance** – be positive about the change and spend time reassuring the young person the change is good and they have lots of resources to help them through this period

**How you can help young people during transition:**

It is understood that some ways of working have had to be change due to Covid-19, and it may not be possible to offer the following. Or it may be that it has to be offered in a different way such as virtually or from the web site of the high school.

**Sharing information between schools** – there I so much primary school staff get to know about their pupils which is so valuable for the high school. It is important to consider if some behaviours a young person may display has become the norm to you but someone else would highlight it.

**Organising visits** – this may mean looking at virtual tours on the website.

**Meet the new teachers** – this could be done through photographs on the website, or some schools are recording teachers introducing themselves.

**Encourage joint social events** – although social events are currently on hold there may be an opportunity during August for these to take place. Parents should be encouraged to take children to these.

**Use bridging material & styles** – it is worth finding out what the year 6 pupils will be studying in year 7 and starting some of this so it feels familiar to the child. This could be set as a home study topic.

**Children to be more responsible for their own learning** – some of this should be happening as children are home schooling. It is important for children to become more independent as this will be required of them at secondary school.

**Encourage yr6/7 link/ Yr 7 pen friend** – some schools encourage year 7 pupils to write a letter to the new year 7 pupils, telling them how they were worried but they didn’t need to be.

**Encourage new pairs/groups within class** – It is highly likely that year 6 pupils will need to make new friendships; this should be encouraged whilst at primary school if possible.

**Become active facilitators** – research suggests that secondary school teachers feel that they take the biggest part in transition and would like primary school teachers to take a more active role.

**Include parents** – parents can start worrying about transition very early in the academic year. It is important to keep in touch with parents and encourage then to take an active role in transition.

**Open time to discuss worries** – this could take place over zoom, on a classroom, group or individual level. This gives young people the opportunity to discuss what is worrying them and to see that their worries are normal and most likely felt by others.

**Mindfulness** – Ideally this should be part of the school day. Apps such as Calm or Headspace provide mindful music or guided readings.

**Websites for information:**

Youngminds

NHS

Anna Freud Centre