



Supporting Bereaved Children with Transition and Change

Transition to a new class or school can be a difficult for any child or young person, however for a bereaved child transition will bring further loss and change which can be unsettling. Transitions can be associated with changes in people, places and routines. It is important to consider the impact transition will have and to support children to prepare and manage these changes in advance.

How School Can Support

Bereaved children will need enhanced transition support from a trusted adult. This could involve some of the suggestions below:

- A nominated key adult to offer support before and after transition, communicating with home regularly.
- A transition book to take home over the summer including photos of their new classroom, new teachers and TAs and any new areas of the school they will be accessing.
- A memory book from their current class. This could include photos, letters, messages etc.
- Arrange a meeting with the child's existing teacher, new teacher and the child to acknowledge the bereavement together and share stories about the person who died. The child's current teacher can then model the language used with the child and share any scripts agreed with the family.
- Provide transitional objects. The child's new teacher could give the child something to look after over the summer.
- Keep as much the same as possible. Explicitly point out to the child what will be the same and what will be different.
- Create a visual representation of the child's support network at school E.g. A photo of the child with their new teacher and key adults. This could include a consistent adult that has not changed e.g. TA/ELSA/SENCO.
- Have a structured and planned ending with the child's current teacher. E.g. a hot chocolate together to say goodbye. Many bereaved children will have experienced the sudden loss of a loved one and additional, sudden endings will be hard.
- A jar of strengths. A small jar filled with positive statements about the things the child has accomplished over the school year. E.g. I am kind, I am helpful, I am brave, I am a good friend, I listen well. They can then look through their jar in the holidays and feel positive about themselves.



Transition: Key Facts

Transition and change can be unsettling or anxiety provoking for anyone of any age.

Transition and change can increase levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Stress and fear can be felt physically as well as emotionally.

Most children will have developed the resilience to 'bounce back' from change. However bereaved children may need extra support, even if they have previously managed change well.

Preparation for change is essential for smooth transitions. Talk to your child openly and clearly at appropriate stages of transition.

Help your child to label their feelings and help make connections between behaviours and feelings. E.g. "when you run off I'm wondering if you are feeling frightened?".

Change may cause regressions in your child's behaviour. E.g. bedwetting, wanting to be dressed by you again. Talk to your child about what you are noticing, reassure them and offer nurture and connection.

Remember that even if your child displays challenging behaviour, punishments and shaming can make transitions worse. Continue to reassure your child that they are safe, secure and loved.

Repeatedly remind your child that this will pass and things will eventually settle.