

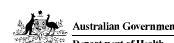
Transitions:
*preparing
children and
young people
for change*



With delivery partners



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Included below are answers to some of the questions we weren't able to respond to during the webinar along with suggestions provided by attendees and references mentioned.

Attendee questions and answers

What can families do to help children and young people having difficulty transitioning to new school environment?

A good place to start is encouraging a collaborative approach between the learning environment and the family. Get to know their concerns and share your own observations and support strategies. The family can also help their child or young person develop a range of coping strategies by:

- listening and talking to their child or young person
- helping them to identify their concerns or worries, and acknowledge how they are feeling. For example, using language such as, "it sounds like you are worried about who you will play with at school tomorrow." For some children and young people, this works better when it's combined with another activity as they feel less pressure (for example, driving in the car, washing the dishes and so on).
- providing comfort to their child or young person. There may be times when a child or young person doesn't want to talk; and just having a family member nearby engaging in a shared activity, letting them know they're available is helpful.
- providing reassurance when they're feeling worried or unsure. For example, families could say, "It's a big playground but there's an area for just the little kids to play."
- demonstrating and modelling ways they cope with situations. For example, saying something like, "I'm going to take five deep breaths to help myself relax."
- encouraging help-seeking by teaching children and young people when to ask for help
- encouraging their child or young person by talking positively about their attempts to cope.

However, if the family continues to be concerned about their child or young person, they may need assistance in seeking additional support. Often a GP is a good place to start to discuss their concerns.

How can I make connections with Elders in the community to help educators gain more information of how to assist in transitioning children from Aboriginal and Torres Islander backgrounds?

A great place to start is the Department of Education in your state or territory – most departments will have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education policies which address curriculum support and local community engagement. Many also have paid staff who can provide advice on how to reach out to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities including Elders.

In addition to government, most states have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education bodies representing communities and local areas. These are usually voluntary, so may have limited time and resources for most committees.

In relation to specific access to Elders, this may be possible through these groups by making time to build reciprocal relationships or by procuring a specific service and paying for someone's time and expertise. Some Elders can and do provide these types of services. Some Elders may be difficult to contact because of their significant workload, while there are only very few Elders available in some communities. Depending on the community, it may have already had input and approval from Elders around what local culture is taught across all educational settings, so the knowledge may have already been shared.

Routines can help children and young people through transitions, but how do you avoid them from becoming dependent on the routine and not able to cope if routine is broken?

As we know, routines provide children and young people with a sense of predictability and consistency, helping them to feel safe, secure and confident – which is particularly important in helping them cope with change such as transition into a new learning environment. Changes in the environment, including a routine, can involve an emotional adjustment.

As children grow older, they tend to get better at managing and adapting to new circumstances. This is because older children or young people have developed the cognitive skills to be able to consider the situation more holistically and have developed some skills in managing their emotions (although, of course, there are individual differences in this). Routines are important but so is flexibility and learning skills to cope with changes (big and small). To assist, educators might:

- ensure routines are responsive to individual needs but not too rigid and build in some flexibility or 'tweaks' to the daily structure
- teach and practice skills that help children and young people cope with change (for example, helpful thinking, "I can do this", "I can have a go", taking deep breaths, supporting a friend)
- prepare children and young people for change by giving advance warning where possible
- use routines as an opportunity to connect, extend thinking and promote problem solving
- model and demonstrate how you cope with the unexpected (for example, "Oh no, the interactive whiteboard isn't working today – I guess I'll have to teach from a hard copy. That's not as good, but I guess I'll be OK.")

What are some more examples of partnerships with local communities, especially for early learning services?

Community services differ from state to state and between local government areas. Funding for various services does tend to change over time as new programs become available and others finish up. Therefore, it's really important to get to know your local area. Invest some time in auditing what's out there and keep updating your information. Sometimes local councils have already done this work of gathering information on local services, so you could start by contacting them and asking what they have available. Other ideas include:

- calling around local services and asking what they can offer. Invite them into your setting to talk to educators about their programs and referral pathways.
- checking if there are any not-for-profit/community agencies operating in your area – sometimes they have specific programs for early years
- finding out if early childhood professionals are working in your area, like early childhood advisers or consultants. You may like to find out if your service has access to such support
- inviting local services to deliver their programs at your setting – for example, parenting workshops, information sessions and so on.

How do you deal with multiple transitions at the same time?

Some children and young people may be dealing with multiple transitions as they start their new learning environment, such as moving home, parental separation, a sibling moving to high school, bereavement and so on. Every child or young person is an individual and some may have the emotional regulation skills as well as family and community supports to enable them to thrive. However, the experience of multiple transitions can place a child or young person at greater risk of experiencing adjustment difficulties. Therefore, the protective factors discussed in the webinar become even more important for these children and young people. These include:

- helping a child or young person to build a sense of belonging to their new environment
- ensuring positive relationships with the important people in their lives including educators
- building partnerships and working with families
- developing social and emotional skills as well as coping skills.

If you're aware that a child or young person is experiencing multiple transitions then it helps to keep an extra eye out for them, provide support where necessary (for example, scaffolding relationships with peers) and keep in contact with family so that you can work together to help them settle and get the most from their learning environment.

What are some other specific strategies to use in early childhood for children having a difficult time transitioning into group times?

Transitions are part of life – we all experience transitions on a daily basis which require us to adapt to changes around us (for example, getting out of bed, going to work et cetera). Just like us, children experience numerous transitions or changes throughout their day and experience a range of feelings as they anticipate or respond to change. The way in which they respond to transitions is influenced by their developmental stage as well as individual differences and preferences.

All children can benefit during transitions from positive relationships with educators who help them feel safe and secure, and use transition experiences as learning opportunities (for example, supporting children over time to develop the skills to cope with change). This is particularly important for children who find transitions challenging (such as saying goodbye to a family member at drop off, moving between activities et cetera). Educators can help children to cope by:

- ⦿ thinking about what the child's behaviour might be telling you – what might they be thinking and feeling? (for example, "I don't feel safe yet", "I'm not sure what's going on")
- ⦿ acknowledging and labelling what the child might be feeling to help them over time develop the language and ability to understand their emotions (for example, "I can see you feel very upset right now")
- ⦿ being present and sitting with a child who's upset, providing warmth and comfort
- ⦿ helping children anticipate change by providing advance notice and then taking time over transition between activities.
- ⦿ considering if the change is necessary and if the child has had enough time to finish their activity
- ⦿ building positive relationship with the child and their family to build a sense of confidence and security.

Any further advice or resources to assist in engaging with families to support children and young people during transitions?

There are a number of resources on the Be You website to assist you in engaging with families to support children and young people during transitions. You might like to read the [Fact Sheet on Transitions](#) or complete Be You Professional Learning in the [Family Partnerships](#) domain.

A few ideas to get you started:

- ⦿ Get to know families through informal chats and/or formal planned transition events. You could find out what is important to them regarding their child or young person's development, invite them to share information they see as important about their family, find out about their child's strengths, interest and preferences.
- ⦿ Consider how you communicate information during transition and whether it is inclusive and accessible (for example, think about literacy, language, cultural norms, and individual preferences).
- ⦿ Invite feedback from families on your transition processes (for example, what they find helpful or would change)

- Ask families how they'd like to be involved in your learning community and avoid making assumptions.
- Provide information and ideas to families about what they can do to support their child or young person during transition.
- Where possible, invite community agencies or organisations to run parenting workshops or information sessions for families.

Is the physical environment important? This can be difficult to influence in a school setting – do you have any suggestions?

Focus on smaller changes that you can make, such as making sure children, young people and their families feel like they're being reflected in display items like posters, photos, books and toys.

People registered for Be You can refer to the [Be You Actions Catalogue](#) for more ideas on ways to promote wellbeing through your physical environment.

Is the transition to Year 7 as significant as in a primary setting? Is it more significant?

Both are significant as they involve significant changes for the child or young person (for example, changes in relationships, the environment, rules and procedures and learning experiences). Young people entering secondary school must cope with a much bigger environment in comparison to primary (for example, multiple relationships, increased responsibility et cetera).

From an adult perspective, starting primary school can seem as though the changes are less significant; however, from a young child's perspective entering primary school can feel really momentous. Reasons for this include the fact that they're at a younger developmental stage and, therefore, at an earlier stage of developing skills such as emotion regulation and coping skills. Starting primary school often means moving from a play-based curriculum into more formal learning experiences.

The level of significance for a child or young person is also influenced by a range of factors including:

- individual differences (for example, temperament)
- opportunities provided to become familiar with their new learning environment prior to transition
- whether they feel a sense of belonging and have positive relationships with key adults and peers
- opportunities for family involvement.

When these elements are present, they increase continuity for children and young people and support them to settle into their new environment.

How can I support a child who's learning to manage emotions and is distressed due to separation anxiety?

Separation anxiety is a common response for children from around six months in babies and toddlers. Preschool children may also experience separation distress and, for some, it continues as they start primary school (or may return as a response to change). Usually children's distress is short-lived and they will often settle a short time after saying goodbye to their family member.

Over time, children learn to feel safe in their new surroundings and gradually experience less separation distress. Nevertheless, when children are separating from their family they may behave in hard to manage ways (for example, screaming, tantrums, or refusal). Educators can support children experiencing separation distress in a number of ways including:

- reassuring families that separation distress is very common. Let them know you'll support their child and ask them what they think might help their child to settle.
- talking to families about setting up a positive goodbye routine – something special they can share with their child when saying goodbye such as a bear hug, high five, or a funny or loving gesture
- ensuring families always say goodbye, so long as it's not too lengthy as this can increase separation distress
- asking families if there's a special object they could bring with them to help their child feel connected to home when they're in the learning environment (for example, a family photo, a special scarf, a teddy et cetera)
- building a positive relationship with the child and family to help them feel connected and secure
- helping the child manage their emotions by being with them, talking soothingly, providing reassurance and labelling their emotions
- letting the child know it's OK to feel upset and that you respect their feelings. Once they've begun to settle, help them engage in an activity or participate in lessons.

Most children will settle well with the above support in a short period after families leave. If the distress lasts for prolonged periods of time (for example, throughout the day) or shows no sign of settling over time despite support, then you may need to consider with the family if the child may need some additional support (such as from a psychologist).

Attendee suggestions

- School counsellors and psychologists (if available) are also great supports for a child or young person requiring additional assistance.
- Familiarising a child with routines when they arrive at the learning community is a really simple and good thing to do.
- Social Story books and posters can assist with transitions.
- A peer support or buddy program may assist in supporting transitions.

References from webinar

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