

# Transitions



# Transitions are important

- Transitions occur when a child moves from one part of their educational journey to another (for example, starting at a setting, changing rooms within a setting, moving to a different setting, or transitioning to school).
- Positive transitions are important for supporting children and young people's wellbeing.
- When moving to secondary school, studies have found that children are most worried about the following things:
  - Getting lost.
  - Losing old friends.
  - Discipline and detentions.
  - Homework.
  - Being bullied.



## You should prepare for upcoming transitions

- Starting a new phase in a child's education journey is significant for both the child and their family.
- Activities should support children in becoming familiar with new environments, routines, staff, and peers. For example, practising the journey into school, talking about stranger danger and how to maintain personal safety.

## Parents and schools should collaborate

- Share information about your child to ensure a positive transition. For example, sharing medical or SEND information and agreeing who in school needs to know this.
- Involve other professionals, especially for children with special educational needs.



## Supportive school strategies for all children

- Transition days, and information give, for example, virtual tours through the school websites and/or transition packs: organise tours and sessions to prepare children for their upcoming transition.
- Social-emotional development lessons: teach skills to manage emotions during transitions, for example:
  - Helping children to position the transition as a progression as opposed to a loss.
  - Building children's coping skills and resilience.
  - Emphasising the importance of social support, how this may change at secondary school, and how to access it (Bagnell, 2020).
- Tutor and peer support: create a supportive environment, for example, through the use of vertical tutor groups or peer buddy schemes.

- Tailored support for vulnerable groups: address specific needs for vulnerable groups identified such as, those with SEND needs, mental health difficulties, physical illnesses, negative past education experiences, trauma experience, difficulties around forming peer relationships, and those who have arrived from another country and/or do not speak English fluently. Consider transitions from specialist or PRUs into mainstream. In addition to transitions from children NEET or experiencing EBSA back into mainstream education.

## Key adults can support the process

- Key adults play a vital role in ensuring continuity between home, key people, and all educational settings. For example, Head of Year, SENCo, Tutor or team of key adults.
- They help children become familiar with the setting, offer a settled relationship, and build connections with parents.
- They can hold the transition plan and facilitate early or enhanced transition plans. It is important for Senior Leadership Teams to have oversight of transition plans for the incoming cohort.

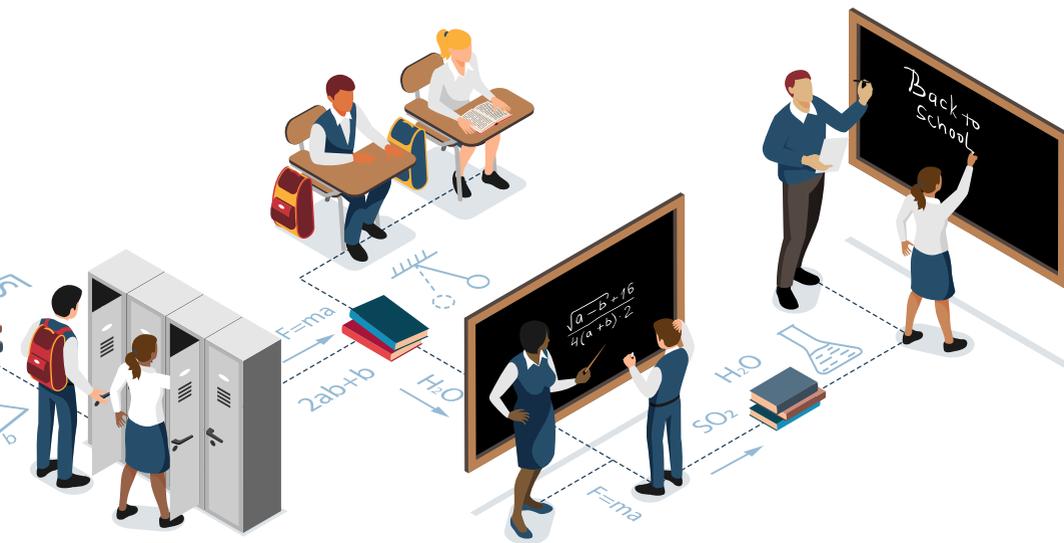


# Helping children and young people understand what to expect:

'it's scary starting a new school'. It's important to acknowledge the feelings that children and young people may have regarding transitions.

## How can should you do this?

- Offer opportunities to share concerns and worries. including anonymously, for example, via a post-box.
- Acknowledge the feelings that children and young people may have regarding transitions.
- Create space and time to explore and discuss concerns and worries.
- Support expectation setting: explain how things will work and what will be expected (including rules, given fears of accidentally getting into trouble).
- Offer tours and transition/taster days to develop familiarity and support expectation setting.



# Developing and sustaining relationships and support:

Relationships and social support are important 'even after the first impression teachers should still be nice'. Schools are social environments that should be welcoming and ease people in: 'because it's important not to just kind of plop them in'.

## How should you do this?

- Create opportunities for students to meet and become familiar with key members of staff, for example, as part of taster days.
- Offer a welcoming, friendly persona from staff.
- Clarify avenues for support and reassurance, for example, key teachers, form tutors, heads of year.
- Exercise flexibility with behaviour policy and allow students time to adjust to new rules.
- Check in with children about their transition experience both informally (check ins) and formally, for example, wellbeing surveys.
- Consider how positive staff-student relationships and support can be extended beyond the initial transition period, for example, beyond the first term.
- Support students in connecting and building relationships with peers.
- Connecting new students with peers who can act as a guide and offer an 'insider'.

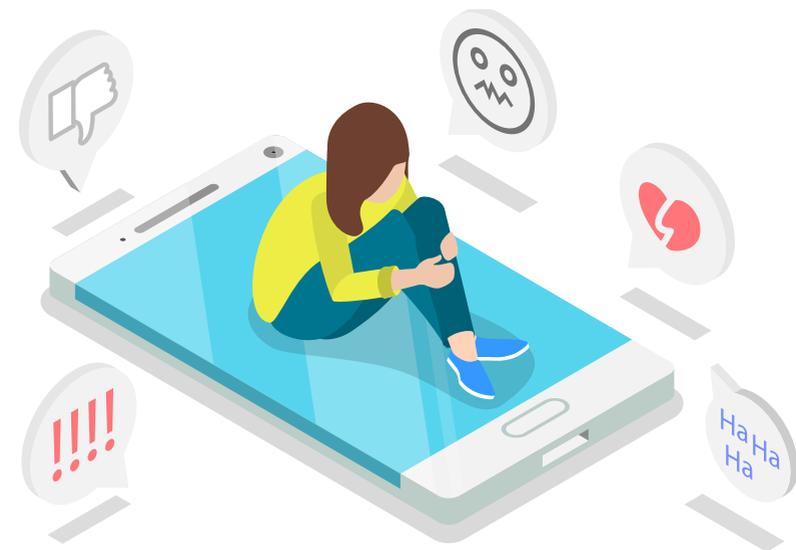


# Being responsive to individual needs and vulnerabilities:

‘Teachers don’t know any problems you’ve got’.

## How can should you do this?

- Encourage awareness among staff of varied individual needs and difficulties in the transition process.
- Work to actively build a picture of individual circumstances and experiences where need is recognized, through **information sharing** and **discussion** with the individual, the family, and previous setting.
- Provide tailored support that links to individualised needs.
- Be empathetic with children and young people where information is still being gathered.
- Be flexible and patient with children and young people who are finding the transition process challenging, allowing them time to adjust slowly.



# Managing feelings of loss and providing a sense of closure:

As students move on, it’s important to manage feelings of loss and provide a sense of closure ‘it tells me they won’t forget me’.

## How can should you do this?

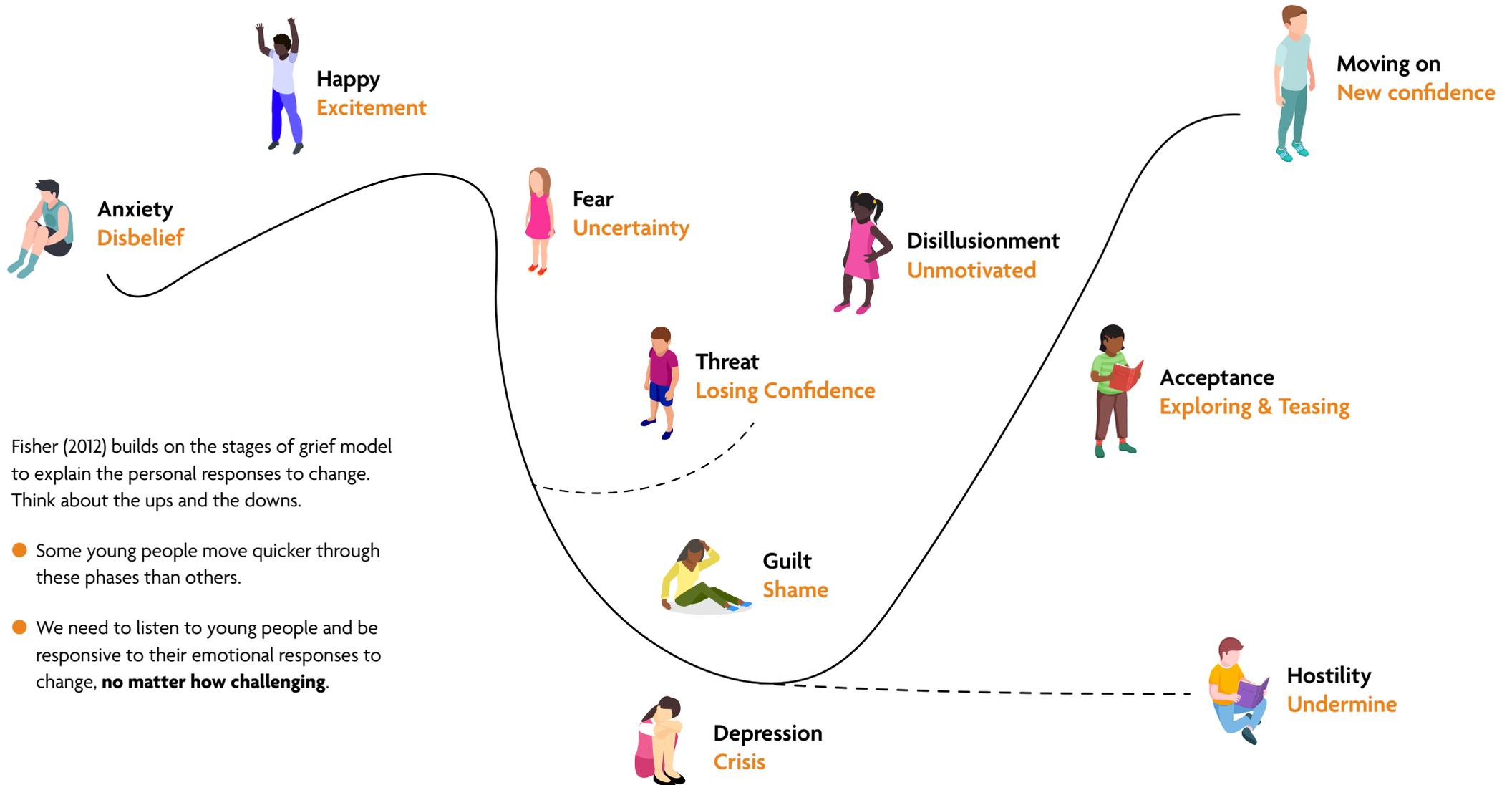
- Be aware that transitions encompass the loss of a social community for a student and may be looking for a sense of closure.
- Communicate to students leaving a setting their value within the community, and that they will be missed.
- Explore ways to create tangible representations that students can take away that can represent their memories (keepsakes such as, cards and books with messages from people).
- Create celebratory moments and events that support students in sharing the changes happening in a positive way.
- Make time for informal opportunities for connection, including social time together and fun shared activities.



# How can psychology help us to understand this?

Transitions from primary to secondary school can bring up feelings of **loss, grief and rejection**.

Gillies (2020) likens changing schools with moving to a new country which requires wide 'cultural agility' skills **including tolerating ambiguity, making sense of the world around us, being adaptable in new situations and relationship building**.



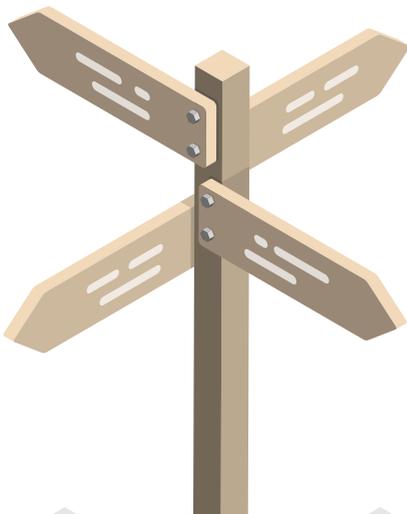
Fisher (2012) builds on the stages of grief model to explain the personal responses to change. Think about the ups and the downs.

- Some young people move quicker through these phases than others.
- We need to listen to young people and be responsive to their emotional responses to change, **no matter how challenging**.



People experiencing the same transition can feel very differently. Emotions can be contagious and increase the intensity of feelings for other people. Gillies (2020) suggests that as change approaches common emotions include:

- **Conflicting feelings** – excited and nervous/ happy and sad/ certain and wary.
- **Denial** – ‘I’m not leaving.’
- **Itchy feet** – ‘I can’t wait to leave.’
- Feeling the loss of status and identity ‘I am no longer in the netball team.’ Or feeling like they are at the bottom of the pecking order.
- **Grief** – sadness that comes with many endings and can trigger past losses.



Labelling the range of emotions observed in transition normalises common responses. Parents and staff can do this by:

- Being present, tolerating big emotions, acknowledging and validating responses and not trying to fix the situation (Gillies, 2020).

Gillies, 2020 recommends the **RAFT** model from Pollock and Van Reken (2009) which can help children have a good goodbye and manage their feelings of loss. In addition to and helping them to anticipate future needs to say a good hello.

- **Reconciliation**, either individually or between people, can help to resolve any difficulties at the time when it is meaningful.
- Being able to show **Affirmation** values others who have helped you.
- **Farewells** acknowledge the end and act as a rite of passage to bring closure.
- Consider goodbye to place and possessions as well as people.
- **Think destination** focuses our attention on the future opportunities and challenges that lay ahead.

## Signposting to resources

<https://youtu.be/thnoUraeoGs> - Moving on up has been developed to support children to feel:

- Less anxious about the move to secondary school.
- Open up discussions about potential worries.
- Help find solutions during periods of change.

**Supporting learners with autism during transition (autismeducationtrust.org.uk)** - Example questions to ask SENCOs and templates for transition to Secondary school. Parents are recommended to consider these questions for all children as they are still applicable.



