

A Key Transition:

A resource for Parents/Carers supporting young people to transition to a new school

Jersey Psychology and Wellbeing Service

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Introduction: After the Covid-19 lockdown, return to education in Jersey is under the guidelines of the Government and Children, Young People, Education and Skills (CYPES). Measures are in place and all advice from Jersey Government is followed to keep everyone safe.

We have all been through the same unusual and challenging times and are bound by this shared experience.

After time away from school, some young people may be excited as we return to formal education, others may have found the prospect of returning more daunting. For those who are due to change class, or change school, school staff will do all they can to make these moves as enjoyable and as stress free as possible. In normal times, there would be introductory sessions in the months/weeks beforehand. Depending on the timetable, teachers may either continue to offer these normal sessions, or may undertake them slightly differently. Every establishment will complete this in their own way but rest assured that everyone will be working hard to encourage a positive and smooth transition.

This document offers support to parents/carers considering what to do in order to support young people as they prepare to transition to a new school.



In this document:

- What is transition?
- What are some of the key factors that contribute to ensuring your young person has a smooth transition?
- Successful transitions.
- Challenges.
- Closure.
- Support strategies.
- What might be helpful during the transition period as a parent/ carer?

What is transition?

Transition is the movement, passage or change from one position, state, stage, subject or concept to another. Changes can be gradual or sudden, and last for differing periods of time. The term 'transition' is used to refer to life changes young people may go through. For some young people times of transition and change can be particularly difficult without a worldwide pandemic to navigate.

Like many of us, young people may need time to process what settling back into school life will look like and feel like.. They have been out of normal routines, may not have seen their friends as often as they would like, and some have had to self-isolate. For many, returning to their place of education may have been a relief and perhaps even exciting. For a few, it will have been a time of increased anxiety,



particularly for those who have underlying health conditions or who live with someone who is shielding. Feeling safe may now be associated with 'staying at home', 'social distancing' and frequent handwashing. It will be a challenge to find new ways to continue to feel safe whilst associating with friends, teachers and peers and studying in an educational setting.

Reducing difficulties during any time of change, by even a small amount, can make a big difference to young people. Change is a normal part of life and can provide opportunities for young people to develop their resilience. Whether a young person has returned to the same school, is thinking about changing schools, or moving to college/University or work, this transition period needs to be carefully managed and a bespoke gradual integration is key. If a young person struggles with a transition it can have a negative impact on their wellbeing and academic achievement and, whilst they may very well recover and move forward to enjoy themselves, we would all prefer a time of normal angst that every one of us has experienced ourselves having attended school.

Points to Consider

A few points to consider in these extraordinary times:

- Everything is uncertain at the moment and it's fine not to have all the answers.
- Everything is NOT normal. Expectations of returning to normality are likely to be high but perhaps not always realistic. Start thinking about the 'new normal'.
- Relationships are incredibly important.
- Everyone is doing the best they can, even with reduced resources.
- Being safe is of paramount importance to be able to learn.
- Everyone will have their own experiences from lockdown and will need space and time to process and share these experiences.
- Some people will be more affected than others.
- We all experience challenges with transition at times in our lives, even without the need for a Covid-19 response.
- The majority of young people will transition with no significant challenge.
- The support and role models around young people have a vital part to play in acknowledging feelings, building resilience and navigating what lies ahead of us positively. This includes peer group support in addition to a calm, positive approach from family members.



What are some of the key factors that contribute to ensuring your young person has a smooth transition?

- Talk about education – listen to any worries or concerns young people may have and try to address these.
- Liaise with the school about a potential visit if appropriate. This may be virtual. There may be something online that can be accessed to read/watch to familiarise young people with their new environment. This might include a site map, photos of interior areas, staff profiles, up-to-date information regarding the current situation and information about the start of term.
- Visit the place of education prior to young people starting and perhaps complete a practice school journey before starting. This may well be organised for you.
- Communicate and share accurate information with the place of education. Be open and honest.
- Encourage positive conversations about learning.
- Assist with self-planning and organisational skills.
- Ensure that your young person is prepared for a different setting. There may be additional rules as a result of the Covid-19 e.g. social distancing, wearing masks.
- If you know a friend in a similar position, consider joining up with them.
- Encourage a positive attitude about the change and inspire the young person to take up new challenges.
- Remember to ask questions if there is anything you are unclear about.
- It's also a good opportunity to remind young people that they will learn more about their school the more they attend, as things become familiar. This is normal.

When transition is successful:

For a successful transition, a young person will thrive if there is a good partnership between home and their place of education.

Following a positive transition, young people feel that:

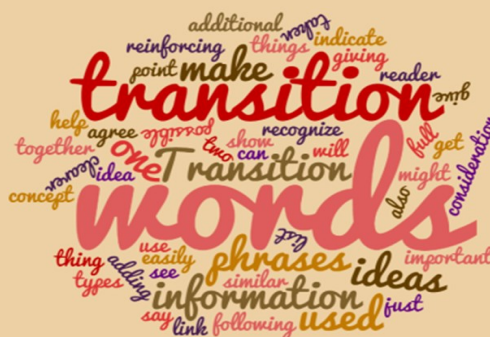
- they belong in their place of education, and are well included in activities and programmes.
- they are positively connected to their peers, other young people, and to their teachers.
- they have a buddy system e.g. other more senior students to help them settle in to answer any questions they may have.
- their teachers know them, including their strengths, interests and learning needs, and show they are interested in them.
- they have a sense of purpose.
- they have an understanding and commitment to their learning pathway through their education.
- they feel they are making progress.
- their current learning follows on from their previous learning (the curriculum is connected and continuous) and is appropriately challenging.
- learning is interesting, relevant and is fun.
- their families have been included in decisions.
- they are physically and emotionally safe and are aware of whom to speak to if they have any concerns or questions.
- they have opportunities to try new, exciting things and/or extend their skills/interests (e.g. through extra curricular activities).

Potential challenges:

The reassuring news is that schools manage transitions for students regularly, so they know the patterns to watch out for and what works. In a few cases, young people may find the process of transition hard. Below are some of the things to look out for as a parent/carer, which may suggest your young person is struggling a little with their transition:

- Problems making friends
- Feeling they do not belong
- Finding it hard to cope
- Increased non-attendance
- Challenging or disruptive behavior
- Lower than expected grades
- Disinterest in school/education e.g. quiet or withdrawn
- Problems and uncertainty due to a lack of transition planning and documentation e.g. a young person may not know where they will be based, and they may be unsure as to what their future may bring.

Everyone is unique and as a parent/carer, you know your young person best. If you are becoming concerned, about any of the points above, contact a member of school staff and discuss any issues which may have arisen. The points above don't all lead to significant changes and additional support, but they do warrant a conversation and an increased focus on the young person from you at home and from some key members at school.



Closure

In addition to supporting young people towards a new setting, it is also important to have closure from their previous setting. This will, no doubt, be a key factor to our return to school at this time. The young person may have missed out on activities and celebrations which they may have been looking forward to. For many, ending a certain year of education, or leaving one school for another, may evoke a sense of grief and loss because this represents a farewell phase and these feelings can be exacerbated if typical processes (a rite of passage) haven't been able to be followed e.g. end of term ball.

Below are some key ideas to consider when supporting positive endings:

- Talk to your school staff or other parents and explore whether you can organise online 'meet ups' for students in their tutor groups and perhaps a virtual leavers' book. You may wish to liaise with the school PTA to see what can be done.
- Consider what extended opportunities there are to say goodbye to the school environment, friends and teachers.
- Schools may explore with you the possibility of holding leavers assemblies in autumn when schools are potentially back open and able to do so safely.
- Discuss and explain that some school friends will attend different places and schools. This is particularly true in Jersey given the range of school options available e.g. single sex private schools.

However, if there are peers who are of particular importance, there are a variety of ways in which to maintain contact and keep that relationship in place and it is worth exploring these to minimise feelings of loss.



Support strategies

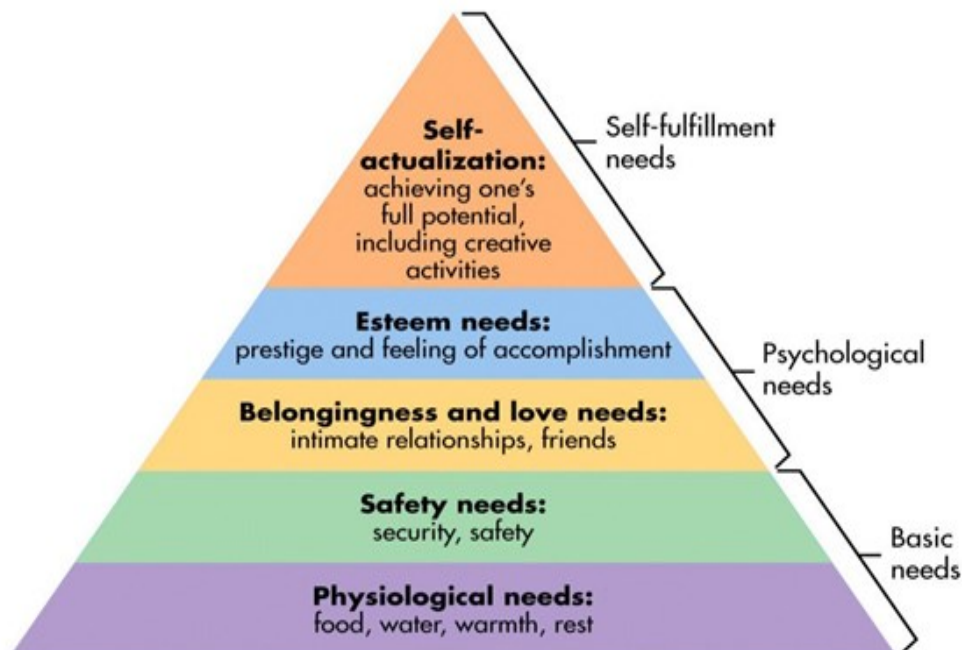
There is still some uncertainty around the current COVID-19 outbreak, particularly given that the situation is constantly developing and our knowledge about the virus is evolving daily.

Understandably, this can cause feelings of worry and anxiety for everyone. It is therefore important to not only consider physical health during such challenging times, but also to pay attention to mental health. It is normal to feel worried, stressed and/or anxious when faced with uncertain situations, and the sooner we acknowledge and learn to take care of our mental health and general wellbeing, the healthier and better equipped we will be to cope with the situation we are all facing. This is true for both parents/carers and young people.

Whilst we all react differently, anxiety is a common response and it is important to remember that this is a **NORMAL** reaction to an **ABNORMAL** event.

There are many strategies to help manage excessive anxiety. Some of these are mentioned below and many more are available online at Gov.je:

- 1. Understanding** – Know the strategies that work for your young person.
- 2. Listen** – Listen to any concerns or worries that they may have.
- 3. Foundations** - We are more vulnerable to heightened emotions if we are not getting enough sleep; eating a poor diet; not exercising enough; in pain; and/or misusing substances. Therefore, it is important to monitor these areas and, if needed, set supportive goals. It is also important to address any underlying causes of anxiety, such as bullying. All basic needs must be met before a young person is able to learn. See below Maslow's theory:



- 4. Name to tame** - Research studies of the brain show that activation in the amygdala (fight or flight part of the brain) reduces just by naming the emotion that is present. It is important though that we name the emotion in a non-judgemental tone (as though naming it for a friend).
- 5. Anchor/ground** - Anchoring or grounding are terms used to describe the process of bringing attention into the present moment in a way that can help alleviate heightened emotions. Though some people like to use their breath for this, many people prefer to use their extremities (hands or feet) or their senses. Pushing your feet into the floor and noticing sensations beneath the feet and in other areas of the legs; or pushing the palms of the hands together and bringing attention to the pressure between the hands and tension in other areas of the arms and shoulders. If feeling agitated brisk exercise can be helpful.

54321 is a commonly used technique to help ground. You firstly notice and silently name 5 things you can see in your environment; then 4 things you can feel; 3 things you can hear; 2 things you can smell or imagine the smell of; and 1 thing you can taste or imagine the taste of.

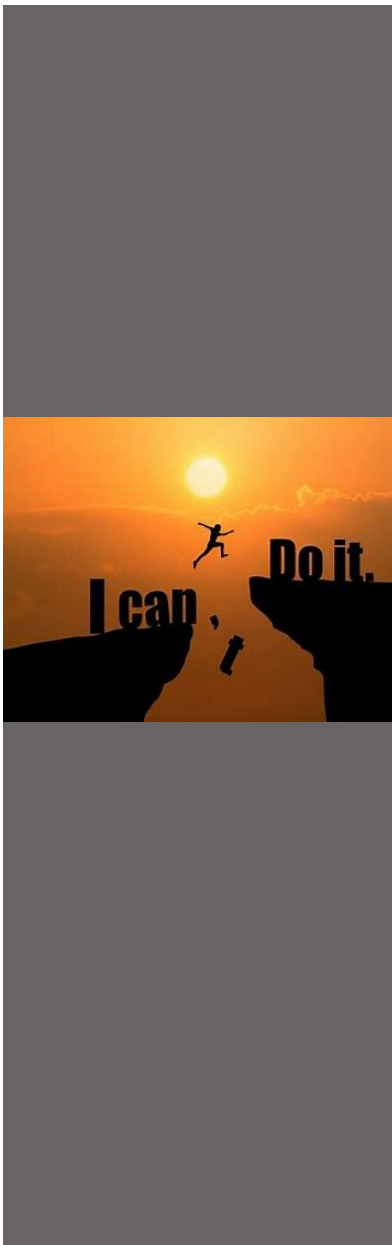
- 6. 7/11 and abdominal breathing** – 7/11 breathing involves breathing in for a count of 7 and out for a count of 11. The outbreath triggers the relaxing parasympathetic response, so extending the outbreath in this way can help promote feelings of calmness. This can feel awkward at first but through practice can feel normal. If possible, breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth, gently blowing.

Abdominal breathing (sometimes called ‘diaphragmatic’ or ‘belly breathing’) encourages use of the full capacity of the lungs. As you breathe out, pull the belly in toward the spine, emptying the lungs. Then notice how when you breathe in, your belly naturally rises.

- 7. Climbing the ladder** - Sometimes called ‘graded exposure’ or ‘desensitisation’, the ladder approach is frequently used in therapies to improve confidence in gradually facing situations which feel anxiety provoking.

Firstly, you need to identify a goal that you would like to achieve, that currently feels unrealistic due to heightened feelings of anxiety. You then need to break down this goal into progressively easier steps (like steps of a ladder). The first step should be something that although anxiety provoking, feels achievable. Once this step is practised and more manageable, you then focus on the next step, and so on.





8. **Problem-solving** – although we tend to do this naturally when we are feeling calm, it is sometimes useful to follow a problem-solving approach when considering a plan of action.

Step 1 – Identify the problem. Try to be as specific as possible. For example, rather than ‘feeling anxious’ write ‘feeling anxious when walking through town on a Saturday’.

Step 2 - ‘Brainstorm’. Think of as many possible solutions to the problem. Don’t worry if some of these ideas are unrealistic or silly. The purpose of this step is to be as creative as possible.

Step 3 – Choose a few possible solutions from the list generated above and consider the advantages and disadvantages of each one. You might give all advantages and disadvantages the same weight, or you may choose different weights based on their importance.

Step 4 – Decide on a chosen solution based on weighing up pros and cons.

Step 5 – Plan and action solution.

Step 6 – Evaluate effectiveness and review. If the solution didn’t work you return to step 1 and restart the process, including your new learning to the process.

9. **Facing fear** = courage



What might be helpful during the transition period as a parent/carer?

Some parents/carers may also find our emergence from lockdown very challenging and worry about young people facing future transitions which can, at times, feel very significant. It's entirely normal to feel a sense of protection towards our children but it is also important to remember that resilience is born from facing our anxieties and learning coping strategies to manage one's self. Our children will benefit from positive adult role models at home, able to remain calm, looking for solutions. It may also be useful to take comfort from the fact that the impact of Covid-19 is felt by everyone, in every school, so there will be a range of shared experiences for students in September.

Parents/carers may also experience a similar range of reactions and feelings in response to the pandemic and lockdown period as the young people in their care. Consequently, many of the strategies discussed above, will also apply. Further information is also available in our online therapeutic grab packs covering mental health and wellbeing (gov.je). The less anxious a parent feels, the less anxiety is passed on to the young person.

Things that may also help you and your family:

- Eat well and regularly.
- Get into a routine.
- Take time out to relax.
- Exercise.
- Try to get enough sleep.
- Reduce time spent watching the news.
- Share your worries.
- Don't put pressure on yourself.
- Talk to and support other parents and families.
- Mindfulness based activities- having strategies you can use in the moment to support you to stop...clear your mind for a few seconds...focus on your breath...carry on again.
- Take some time for you – recharge your batteries and give yourself permission to have time when you focus on yourself as an individual.

And finally, be hopeful and optimistic.

Useful Websites

<https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/issue/transitions/>

Top tips for young people moving from primary to secondary school.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/moving-on-top-tips-for-pupils.pdf>

Top tips for pupils moving on to secondary school.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/transitioning-to-secondary-school/zkc9pg8>

Transitioning to secondary school.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/worry-free-kids/201710/how-help-child-overcome-school-refusal>

Support and advice on how to overcome school refusal.

www.gov.je/education

Government Guidelines.

<https://parentzone.org.uk/article/how-prepare-secondary-school-life-after-lockdown>

Advice for parents of primary and secondary age students.

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/time-to-talk/how-to-help-your-children-reintegrate-into-post-lockdown-life/ar-BB144EIP>

A 'how to guide' for parents to support reintegration into post-lockdown life.

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/helping-your-child-cope-with-back-to-school-anxiety/>

General advice on supporting students returning to school.

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/coronavirus/hibernation/making-the-transition-of-back-to-school-easy-for-the-whole-family/news-story/e2c6aa33ae591ad03be69c50da90dd99>

General advice on supporting the whole family when returning to school.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

UK Government guidance for parents/ carers supporting children and young people's mental health.