

PARENT AUTHORED ADVICE

Subject: Transition Planning

Transition planning is a very important necessity that needs to be given adequate time and thought. A change of school or class needs to be well prepared for to reduce anxiety levels and to pave the way for progress. The following information will be helpful to parents and professionals who want to plan a smooth transition for a child with Selective Mutism.

This document is published by SMIRA and is written by a dedicated parent, known to SMIRA, from their own experiences, in the hope that it will be useful to others.

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Transition planning

The importance of Transition Planning

Starting school, changing school or changing classes are significant events for most children, with the huge change potentially causing a lot of worry, but it can be an especially distressing time for those who are affected by anxiety disorders such as Selective Mutism (SM). Many children with SM are generally anxious individuals and may become increasingly worried about every little aspect of their upcoming change of environment due to the feelings of uncertainty; consequently parents may see behavioural changes such as bed wetting, sleep problems, melt downs at home and parents may notice their child speaking less and less as their anxiety increases.

Many children find change difficult but for a child with Selective Mutism a change such as moving schools or class needs to be managed very carefully and efficiently for the following reasons:

- a) To set the foundations for the child to develop their communication skills in an anxiety free environment giving them the opportunity to leave behind their non-speaking associations.
- b) To prevent the loss of momentum (if the child has made progress)
- c) To pave the way for continued progress and to prevent regression
- d) To prevent a negative impact on the child from high anxiety levels caused by stress
- e) To help the child adapt to the new environment and feel confident in their new surroundings paving the way for recovery.

It is very well documented in all of the literature from recent years and the advice is clear that if early identification of Selective Mutism is followed by an appropriate intervention then the majority will overcome their difficulties with the prognosis a lot more promising. If schools promptly adopt good practices, such as implementing strategies recommended by Speech and Language Therapists, Educational Psychologists and parents then this can save many years of anguish for children and their parents, reducing the likelihood of worsening, extended or additional difficulties which consequently present the need for a more prolonged, costly, and time consuming intervention. The organising and implementation of a Transition Plan can act as your first chapter of the appropriate intervention that will help a child to combat their anxieties and find their voice. School staff and parents have very important roles in this process and must work together as a team with other relevant professionals (if involved) to plan a successful transition that will ultimately meet the child's social, emotional and communication needs.

This document sets out guidance as best practice. Strategies can be adopted and then adapted to meet the needs of the child. The guidance has been written with primary age school children in mind although a lot of it is suitable for all and suggestions can be adapted to suit the child's developmental level. There are three real life examples at the end of the document to give you an idea of what a plan can look like, what can be realistically agreed, plus an idea of timing and length of the plan in relation to how much progress a child has made in overcoming Selective Mutism.

Arrange and prepare for the Transition Meeting

Parents, teachers or other involved professionals can make the first move to arrange a transition meeting. The meeting can be requested in person or by phone but it may be beneficial to ask in

writing or by email so to leave a paper trail. All involved individuals (new and current) should be invited to the meeting. This may include the Parents, Teacher, Teaching Assistant, Keyworker, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo), Pastoral Support worker, Head Teacher, Speech and Language Therapist (SLT), and Educational Psychologist (EP). This will make up the team around the child who will work together to create and implement the plan. There will most likely need to be more than one transition meeting as at the initial meeting there may be information unknown such as which new teacher/s the child will have, and also because the process may need to be reviewed as it progresses.

Parents often play a crucial role in delivering the transition strategies which should usually include a small steps plan, as they are most likely the people that the child feels most confident and at ease with. Recent research concluded that 'Guided Parent' delivered therapies provide an effective treatment for children with anxiety disorders. The findings show that if parents are guided by knowledgeable professionals or by educating themselves with the recommended literature then their input and participation in strategies to help their children is extremely useful and productive. Parents should educate themselves with the help of their SLT, EP or by contacting the Selective Mutism Information and Research Association (SMiRA) and reading the documents provided, or by reading books such as the Selective Mutism Resource Manual (SMRM). Parents can then recommend their readings to school staff if the staff need help to understand the condition and the necessary plans that need to be made. It would be helpful to provide this information to the individuals who need it before the meeting so that they can enter the meeting with some level of understanding.

When the meeting is arranged to take place will depend on when you need to start implementing the plan. If a child is not speaking at all in school, is only whispering, or can only speak in a limited amount of situations, it is advisable to hold the meeting at around Easter time. If it's just a change of class and the child is well on their way to overcoming Selective Mutism with their speech nearly generalised within the school environment, i.e. the child can speak to most people, in most situations and can manage high communication loads in lots of situations then holding the meeting around the summer half term should suffice. Needless to say that arranging the meeting a couple of weeks before the end of the summer term is totally inadequate and will not provide you with the time needed to implement an effective plan.

It may be helpful for parents to take to the meeting any helpful documents – highlighting relevant parts that will be of help to guiding the team and/or to back up your requests. They could also put together a suggested provisional plan that the team can then work on and finalise together. It will be beneficial for parents to write up a Personalised Guidance doc which outlines exactly how Selective Mutism affects their child and how everybody can help. This will need to be updated regularly.

At The Meeting

- Educate the team:
Hopefully all of the members of the team have been informed about Selective Mutism and the needs of the child prior to the meeting and so have a fair understanding of the difficulties that are faced. However if this is not the case first and foremost the members will need to be familiarised with all the important basic information that they need.

- Present the Personalised Guidance document and go through it. Ask if anyone present who knows the child has anything they would like to add and answer any questions.
- The school staff need to understand that ALL staff must work together to create an anxiety free environment in which the child can thrive. All staff must have knowledge of the child's difficulties, what they can do to help, and the plan which is in place.
- Suggest staff training delivered by a trained professional (or by the parent if confident enough). The DVD 'Silent children' could be shared with the school to educate.
- Discuss the importance of Transition planning as outlined above if necessary.
- Decide and record when to implement the plan and how often sessions should take place: When the sessions are to commence will depend on how many sessions it is predicted will be needed to meet the aim of the sessions. It is advisable to have at least two 10-15 minute sessions per week after school when the setting is quiet. The amount of sessions needed will vary from child to child but for a child with high anxiety levels who is not speaking at all in school, who is only whispering, or who can only speak in a limited amount of situations, e.g. only one to one, or only during small group work, it would be advisable to start a week or two after Easter. It may feel like there is a long time until the transition at this point but the end of Easter signifies the beginning of the summer term; the last term that they will spend in their current year group, and a transition plan in such circumstances should be implemented over a number of weeks. The reason for this is that anxiety needs to be tackled in small steps at the child's pace. Please see the Transition plan examples for suggestions on the amount of sessions that may be required dependant on how far a child has progressed.
- Organise a settling in plan for easing into the new class and for creating the anxiety-free environment that the child needs.
- Discuss Small Steps Plan such as the Sliding In process to take place in the new school year to continue progress. Finalise plan for this later after results have been seen from Transition Plan.
- Decide who will be the child's new Keyworker to help support the child during transition and to assist with intervention in new class.
- Decide who will be the child's key-lunchtime supervisor to support the child at lunchtime.
- Discuss who the child's teacher will be (if there is a choice). Look at the options and decide which teacher will be most suited to the child. Which will be the most accommodating to the child's needs? Who is more calm and softly spoken? Who has the best empathy skills?
- The parent may need to know which class their child will be in and who their teacher will be earlier than the rest of the children so that the plan can be carried out effectively. This may go against the normal practices of the school but it may be necessary to make this reasonable adjustment in order to meet the child's Special Educational Need. If the school have a justifiable reason not to accommodate this request then some problem solving will be needed in order to ensure the plan is carried out. E.g. start a little later but hold more sessions per week. Another example may be to concentrate on other areas of the school such as the hall, playground, or PE area first in the plan while you are waiting. Or if there are only two potential classrooms you could do sessions in both rooms if appropriate whilst waiting to slide the teacher in. One last example may be to concentrate on sliding the keyworker in and defer sliding the teacher in until later.

- Write up meeting minutes. What was agreed, what wasn't and why. Ensure all members have a copy.

The Aims of the plan

1. To help the child adapt to the new environment and feel confident in their new surroundings.
2. To set the foundations for the child to develop their communication skills in an anxiety free environment giving them the opportunity to leave behind their non-speaking associations.
3. To aid progress and prevent regression.
4. For the child to 'own' the school 'space', i.e. for the school to become a safe place where they feel comfortable to participate in activities, express themselves and speak.
5. For the child to speak to the parent in the school setting
6. For the child to speak to classroom based adult/s in the school setting.
7. For the plan to be flexible and adaptable based on the child's needs and progress.
8. For all staff to have a good understanding of Selective Mutism, the effect it has on the child as an individual and for the staff to know how they can help.

The Plan

At School:

- Whole class visits/standard visits. Most schools will give all children the chance to visit their new school or classroom a couple of times before they start, usually as a whole class or in a small group.
- Sessions in the empty classroom and other areas of the school at the end of the school day (or before the school day starts if that works better).
These sessions will be at the heart of the plan, the main strategy used to meet the aims of the plan: The sessions will involve exploring the environment and the Sliding In process. The parent should accompany the child along with a sibling or friend of the child's choosing to the school when the pupils are not present and the school is quieter. The sessions should be short: 10-15 mins and implemented over a number of weeks so that the child can move through the plan in small steps, preventing them from becoming overwhelmed. The sessions need to give the child the opportunity to:
 1. Explore the new setting. Explore not only the classroom but the cloakroom, toilets, PE hall, Main Hall etc... You can practice locking the doors on the toilets, trying out the hand dryers, exploring the toy drawers in the classroom and so forth. You could have a treasure hunt around the school/classroom to make it fun.
 2. Feel comfortable enough to speak to the parent and sibling/friend (enticing speech) in the classroom. Progress from playing activities that give opportunity to speak to playing fun activities in which the communication load increases steadily. You can also use graded questioning techniques. Please see further guidance on sliding in, communication load, and graded questioning for more details.
 3. Feel comfortable enough to speak to the classroom based adult in the classroom: Slide in the chosen classroom based adult using guidance from books such as: Helping Your Child with

Selective Mutism by Angela E. McHolm et al, or documents such as Transferring Speech to the Classroom and Generalisation within the School Environment which can be found on the SMiRA website.

4. Go through new school routines: Find out about and practice new routines in the classroom, e.g. the register and morning routine. This may be a good opportunity for the teacher to tell the child that it's O.K. to ask to go to the toilet, ask for help etc... and that the teacher won't put the child on the spot to answer questions in front of the class unless they put their hand up. These permissions and reassurances will help to ease the child's speech related anxieties and will contribute towards creating that anxiety free environment.

Remember you can adopt and adapt strategies to suit the needs of the child. You can only work at the child's pace, so if a child's mutism is very entrenched then all you can do is carry out the plan starting as soon as possible after Easter and monitor the progress that is made. Even if you predict that in the sessions you will only reach the stage of the child speaking in earshot of the teacher then that is still a fantastic achievement which can then be progressed from in the new school year.

- Make a Transition Book (Social Story). This can contain pictures of the classroom, the toilets, the playground and any other relevant places around the school. It can also contain pictures of the teacher, TA, Keyworker, Key Dinner lady. It could feature a specific activity that the child liked to play in the sessions and also the classroom routines. The child could assist in taking the photos as one of the activities in the sessions.
- The Settling In Plan: Strategies for helping the child ease into the new class or school when the Autumn Term arrives. The Settling In Plan may include:
 1. When starting pre-school or Reception Class children may benefit from a gradual acclimatisation period, slowly increasing time spent there with a parent staying for a time then gradually sliding out. The amount of time and sessions the parent stays for would depend on how quickly the child adapts to the new environment. In Germany all schools use this common sense strategy for all young children starting school, they have named it: The Berlin Model. For more information on The Berlin Model please see the document: Acclimatisation: The Berlin Model which can be found in SMiRA's files section.
 2. For ALL school staff to follow guidance from the child's Personalised Guidance document.
 3. If deemed appropriate, for the class to be made aware about the child's difficulties in an age appropriate way, e.g. a story read or a letter read out with or without the child's presence.
 4. A buddy system. Children can be paired up to support each other through the day. This may help the child with SM to make a new friend/s and/or to have someone that can support them with tasks that they find difficult to do on their own. Another benefit to this is that as the child is likely to be more familiar with the classroom and routines compared to the other children thanks to the sessions, so it gives the child the opportunity to successfully help the child they are paired with thus raising the child's confidence.
 5. Rapport building with keyworker/TA/Teacher/peers during 1:1 time or small group activities.

Suggestions for at home:

- Have lots of playdates with other children who will be in your child's class.
- Role play classroom routines.
- Talk excitedly about the upcoming transition and act confidently that you believe that all will be fine and that your child will cope well. Ensure you hide any anxieties you may have.
- A home visit from the Teacher/keyworker/TA
- A postcard or letter from the Teacher/keyworker/TA during the summer.

The following example was written regarding a 4 year old girl starting Reception class. The child had previously remained silent at pre-school for 2 whole years with only the odd word whispered on a few occasions.

Transition Plan for N starting Reception Class

Overview

1. Pre-School – A whole class visit in the summer term.
2. Get N used to new classroom environment and begin sliding in in the empty classroom after school. Sessions will be held on Wednesdays for 4 weeks then Wednesdays and Thursdays for 7 weeks, with Mum and sister and introducing new teacher and TA dependant on how the sessions go and progress seen.

Sessions will be 10-15 mins. Session plan to commence second week after Easter: Wed 4th May. One session per week has been agreed for the first 2 weeks and two per week for the next 9 which gives us 20 sessions.

3. N to have playdates with the selected children over the summer? Parents to be asked.
4. Transition photo book for N. Take photos in an activity with Mum during sessions. Mrs N (TA) to put the book together. To include all relevant areas of school and classroom routines.
5. Mum to prepare N for answering the register and school routines during sessions at school. Role play etc... To be carried on through the school holidays with Mum at home.

Session Plan

The plan is to be as flexible as possible. We may not be able to complete every step with the teacher and TA if progress is slow as there is a lot to do in the time allocated. The amount of sessions for each step has been estimated only. We will go at N's pace.

In sessions 3 – 17 we would not only like to get N used to being in the classroom, but to help her to practice using her voice in the classroom too. The aim is that by session 17 N will feel comfortable with using her voice in earshot of the teacher and TA. The objective of these

sessions is to begin to create an anxiety free environment for N to communicate in and to desensitise her to the staff hearing her voice. I hope to start Sliding In in full in the new school year.

SESSION 1

Explore the classroom with Mum and sister. Open drawers, look at art on the walls, look at the books and toys, look at the displays on the counter tops etc...

SESSION 2.

Explore – Mum and sister to show N where toilets are. Look at how doors lock, practice locking them. Look at where the sinks are to wash hands and hand dryers. Go to classroom for more exploring.

SESSION 3 - 7.

Sit in the library area in the classroom. (The area has book cases to set out a small area where if sitting down you cannot see the rest of the classroom so is an ideal place to begin because we are hidden). Let N choose a tray of toys to play with. Give lots of opportunity to speak. Try and encourage speech gently, e.g. I wonder what this does? Or if small character/animal toys chosen play in role putting on little voices. Make relevant sounds the corresponding toy would make – choo choo for train, woof woof for dog etc...

Also practice using toilet when needed.

Repeat until N able to speak during session.

SESSION 8.

Library area in the classroom with Mum and sister. Play game of Snap.

SESSION 9-11.

Library area. Play a game of Snap with Mum and Sister. Teacher allowed to potter about in classroom at a distance for short periods (not paying us any attention). Repeat as necessary with teacher getting closer each time.

SESSION 12.

Game of Snap with Mum and Sister in Library area. Teacher allowed to comment occasionally. No questions

SESSION 13.

Game of Quack Quack (Orchard Toys) with Mum and Sister in Library area. Teacher allowed to comment occasionally. No questions.

SESSION 14-16.

Game of Quack Quack with Mum and Sister in Library area. TA allowed to potter about in classroom at a distance for short periods not paying us any attention. Repeat as necessary with TA getting closer each time.

SESSION 17.

Game of Quack Quack with Mum and Sister in Library area. TA allowed to comment occasionally. No questions.

SESSION 18.

Take photos (for transition book) all around the classroom and school. Including toilets, playground, teacher and TA.

SESSION 19.

Mum to go through classroom routines with N in the classroom with Teacher or TA on hand for me to ask any questions either of us have.

SESSION 20.

Explore playground with Mum and Sister. Play games. (End on a high with something fun).

Game descriptions:

Snap: Players take it in turns to put down a card. If matching cards are placed the first to say "Snap" wins the cards in the middle.

Quack Quack: Animal cards are all spread out and placed face down in the middle. Players take it in turn to pick two cards. Players must make the corresponding animal noise to the card they pick up. If they pick up a pair they keep the cards. Winner has the most pairs at the end of the game.

The following example was written regarding a 7 year old girl who was changing schools. She was moving from a small infant school to a large primary school. The two schools had a hard federation (the same headmistress and SENCo) so there were very close links and she would have 8 other children within her new class of 30 that moved up with her. The child's intervention so far had been successful and she could speak to her teachers and friends but the more assertive functions of speech needed more work with her speech not entirely generalised. The concern was that if the transition was not managed carefully she would regress and so steps were taken to ensure that the foundations were built for further progress.

Transition plan for N

Overview

The school kindly shared which teacher N will have early so that we can complete the transition plan effectively and prepare N in plenty of time so to meet N's SEN.

1. Get N used to new school environment and begin sliding in – sessions in the empty classroom and other areas of the school after school has finished with Mum, sister and friend of N's choosing. Plan to slide in new teacher and TA.

Sessions will be 10-15 mins. Session plan to commence: Wed 3rd June. Two session per week has been agreed for eight weeks which gives us 16 sessions.

2. Whole class visit in the summer term.
3. At current school – Small group work with Mrs C (pastoral support who works at both schools), N, 1 or 2 friends of Nicole's choosing, and 1 or 2 new school children. Activities to take place when the new school children come over to swim on a Thursday. The group should not have more new school children than current school children and should start off with easy activities with a low communication load. Sessions to take place on Tuesdays.
4. Current school – small group work – new teacher, N, friends chosen by N. Two sessions towards the end of term.
5. N to have playdates with the selected children over the summer.
6. Transition photo book for N. Mrs C to make this with N. To include all relevant areas of school and classroom routines.

7. Mum and new teacher to prepare N for new school routines during sessions at school. Teacher to give permissions and reassurances, e.g. It's ok to ask to go to the toilet.
8. Teacher and other staff to read Personalised guidance document to help them understand N and her difficulties and to help her settle in on her transition days and beyond.
9. New teacher has suggested she will send N a letter telling her all about herself and fun information about year 3.

Session Plan for after school

The plan is to be as flexible as possible. The amount of sessions for each step has been estimated only. We will go at N's pace. As N has made significant progress we expect her to work through the steps quite quickly. Starting off with teacher/TA outside door should not be necessary.

SESSION 1

Explore the classroom with Mum, sister and friend. Open drawers, look at art on the walls, look at the books and displays on the counter tops etc... Also, show N where toilets are. Look at hand dryers.

SESSION 2-3

Play game of Go Fish in empty classroom with Mum, Sister and friend.

SESSION 4-5

As above but with new teacher doing work at her desk not paying us any attention. Repeat with teacher moving her work closer to us. Second time teacher can comment but not ask questions.

SESSION 6-7.

Teacher joins in with game. No questions other than scripted ones within the game. Repeat and gradually build up conversation. Questions allowed once confidence is high enough.

SESSION 8

As above. Mum slides out.

SESSION 9.

Play game of Maths Dice with Mum, sister and friend in empty classroom with TA at desk doing work. TA allowed to comment. No questions.

SESSION 10.

TA joins in game with N's OK.

SESSION 11-13

Mum, Sister, friend and TA to move session location to the year 3 communal work area. Play game of Maths dice. Repeat but move session location to the hall, then repeat but in the gym.

SESSION 14

AS above but in the classroom. Mum slides out.

SESSION 15.

Teacher to go through classroom routines with N in the classroom. Teacher to answer any questions.

SESSION 16.

Explore playground with Mum and Sister. Play games. (End on a high with something fun).

Game descriptions:

Go Fish: Similar to Happy families but you have to match pairs of aquatic animals. Players must in turn ask another player if they have the picture card they are looking for to make up a pair. The winner has the most pairs at the end of the game.

Maths Dice: The 12 sided die is rolled to get the target number, then all 5 scoring dice are rolled. Then the players needs to add or subtract, divide or multiply the numbers on the scoring dice to reach the target number. Players must call out "Maths Dice!" when they have an answer and explain how they reached their answer. If they are correct they keep the dice used untill the end of the round whilst the other players look to see if they can use the remaining dice. Players with correct answers then move their tokens up the scoring track. The more dice you use in your sum the higher your score will be. (This game is good if the child enjoys and is competent in Maths).

The following example was written regarding a 9 year old girl who was changing class from year 4 to year 5. The child's intervention so far had been successful and she could speak to her teachers and friends in most situations. The more assertive functions of speech were emerging and she was close to generalising her speech in the school environment.

Transition plan for N

Overview

The school kindly shared which teacher N will have early so that we can complete the transition plan effectively and prepare N in plenty of time so to meet N's SEN.

1. Get N used to new classroom environment and complete 'accelerated' sliding in with teacher – sessions in the empty classroom after school has finished with Mum, and friend of N's choosing.

Sessions will be 10-15 mins. Session plan to commence: Wednesday 29th June. One session per week has been agreed for four weeks

2. Current school – small group work with new TA, N and friends chosen by N. Two sessions towards the end of term.
3. Mum and new teacher to prepare N for new school routines during sessions at school. Teacher to give permissions and reassurances, e.g. It's ok to ask to go to the toilet.
4. Teacher and other staff to read new Personalised Guidance document to help N settle in on her transition days and beyond.

Session Plan for after school

The plan is to be as flexible as possible. As N has made significant progress we expect that she will not need many sessions, so we have accelerated the process into just a few steps. Starting off with teacher/TA outside door will not be necessary.

SESSION 1

Explore the classroom with Mum, sister and friend. Open drawers, look at art on the walls, look at the books and displays on the counter tops etc... Also, show N where toilets are.

SESSION 2

Play game of Pass the Bomb Junior in the classroom with Mum, Sister and friend. Teacher sits at desk not paying us too much attention.

SESSION 3

Play game of Pass the Bomb Junior with Mum, friend and Teacher in the classroom.

SESSION 4

Play game of Don't Say It with Mum, friend and Teacher. Mum slide's out. Teacher talk about new classroom routines and answer any questions.

Game descriptions:

Pass the Bomb Junior : Looking at the familiar scenes on the pulled card children must take it in turns to think of something that fits into the picture before the bomb goes off.

Don't Say It: A team picks a card and has to describe the word at the top to their teammates without using certain words that are listed below it. E.g. Can you describe a balloon without mentioning "pop", "inflate", "bang" or "float"? Your team must guess before the buzzer goes off. The game has 4 different difficulty levels.

Appendix

References

Research paper: Treatment of child anxiety disorders via guided parent-delivered cognitive behavioural therapy: randomised controlled trial.

The Selective Mutism Resource Manual by Maggie Johnson and Alison Wintgens.

Helping your child with Selective Mutism by Angela E McHolm et al.

Bibliography

- Transition Plans document SMiRA – Maggie Johnson
- Acclimatisation - Berlin Model - SMiRA - Phil Thomason
- Selective Mutism: How to manage a transition to a new class by Lucy Nathanson

Further Reading

All documents mentioned can be found on the SMiRA website and/or the SMiRA Facebook group files section unless otherwise stated.

For some ideas and information on school transitions please see:

- Transition Plans document (also contains some information for older children)
- The Confident Children website's information on transition planning by Lucy Nathanson.
- See the document: Acclimatisation - Berlin Model
- Conference Alice Sluckin – SMiRA

For more information on Small Steps Plans and Sliding In please see:

- The Selective Mutism Resource Manual by Maggie Johnson and Alison Wintgens
- Helping Your Child with Selective Mutism by Angela E McHolm et al.
Documents from SMiRA sources (Facebook group or website):
- Selective Mutism – Sliding in Technique procedure
- Transferring Speech to the Classroom and Working Towards Generalisation within the School Environment
- Planning and Managing a Small Steps programme
- Sliding In
- Creating the right environment

For examples of a Personalised Guidance document please see the document: Personalised Guidance for school staff and children's organised activities.

For more information on playdates see the document: Playdates.