

## TRANSITION PLAN

Preparing to change School, Class or Teacher or start at school or nursery

***Time invested in agreeing and implementing a Transition Plan will ensure that the child adapts quickly to a new environment, builds on progress made and develops in confidence and independence.***

A change of class and/or teacher can be a stressful time, particularly if a child is doing well and parents are afraid of losing momentum. However, if the transition is managed well, children can leave old memories and associations behind and gain confidence and independence in the new setting.

The following recommendations also apply to starting school or nursery for the first time.

1. It is vital that **all** staff in the new setting understand the nature and implications of selective mutism and that there will be no pressure on the child to speak until they are ready. Reassurance should be given to the child to this effect, both by parents and staff (see Phase 1 intervention for relevant information). Identify a learning mentor/keyworker/support teacher in the new setting who will provide an escape route if necessary and meet with the student regularly to ensure they are happy, not being teased/bullied etc.
2. Preparation should start several weeks in advance with positive comments about the move and familiarisation with the building, classroom and staff.  
e.g.
  - social visits with parents for summer fair, concerts, charity events, play schemes etc
  - look round school/class when building is empty (during holiday or after school)
  - take photos and make a booklet about My New Class/School
  - meet the head and classroom teacher/key staff in as informal a situation as possible. Include younger siblings if available and appropriate.
  - routine visit with current class plus one extra visit with familiar adult or friend
  - new teacher/teaching assistant (TA) to visit child in current class or at home. (Home visits likely to be extremely beneficial – SMRM page 131).
  - slide-in new teacher/TA before end of term (Phase 2 intervention)
3. If it is not possible to meet new staff in advance, try to ensure continuity by  
e.g.
  - keeping the child with a best friend
  - arranging for previous teacher/TA to spend some time with the child on their first day
  - 'borrowing' previous keyworker to hand over to new keyworker at beginning of term (Phase 1 or 2 intervention)
  - keeping current keyworker (but beware of child becoming too dependent on one adult over a long period of time)
4. It will be helpful if new teachers/teaching assistants (TAs) can make some time for a few minutes of rapport-building with the child on a one-to-one basis during their first week in order to achieve as many of the following as seem appropriate:

- e.g.
- reassure the child that they will not ask them questions or pick them for demonstrations unless the child volunteers
  - enlist the child's help and then praise for a job well done
  - reassure the child they will be checking they are OK, have a friend to sit with, understand the work, have been to the toilet etc.
  - give the younger child confidence to respond by playing games that initially only require pointing, nodding, shaking the head etc.
  - reassure older children they can contribute/ask questions by writing things down until they feel relaxed enough to talk.
  - explain that they will need to use a loud voice sometimes but this does not mean they are angry (SM children are very afraid of getting things wrong and will withdraw rather than risk being told off).
5. Foster friendships with other children as actively as possible, particularly outside school by inviting peers home to play/have tea. Try to find out in advance if there are children nearby that attend the same school/playgroup and make contact with their parents. Teachers can help by suggesting which children would make good friends and introducing parents after school if parents find it difficult to make the first move.
  6. Parents should stay with children in pre-school settings until the child is comfortable for them to leave. Do not EXPECT the child to be anxious, as this anxiety will be conveyed to the child. Parents need to stay relaxed and calm themselves and praise the child for being brave and staying on their own for longer each day. Do not delay the initial separation too long however, as it is only by facing their fear and successfully coping on their own that children will learn not to be afraid.
  7. If children are finding it hard to join in at pre-school/reception class, parents can come early and join in the last few activities/story with the child so they leave with a positive experience. Alternatively, a parent can stay for the first half an hour, joining in the activities and helping the child to integrate/make friends/build rapport with a designated adult (SMRM page 132). This may occasionally be necessary in Year 1/Year 2.
  8. Pupils preparing for transition to secondary school or college need to focus on developing their independence outside school and confidence in talking to strangers as much as possible during their final year, e.g. making phone calls, running errands, dog-walking, ordering pizza, banking birthday money, earning money car-washing and baby-sitting, going swimming, joining clubs, developing interests etc. etc. (SMRM page 170). The summer holidays are a good time for shared activities and trips with friends who will also be attending the new school/college, and for meeting new people who know nothing of the child's difficulties. Confidence grows through *achievement* and as the child becomes their own person, the seeds can be sown that a fresh start in a new educational establishment is exactly what they need. If they can talk to strangers, they will be able to talk in a new environment.
    - See Danielle aged 15 in BBC Documentary 'My Child Won't Speak'

SMRM = Selective Mutism Resource Manual, Johnson & Wintgens, 2001, Speechmark Publishing Ltd.