



# Mentally Healthy School Transitions

## Guidance for Staff, Parents and Carers.

At Walworth we recognise that change is a normal part of life and can provide opportunities for children to develop their resilience. Whether a child is starting primary school, changing schools, or moving from year groups or primary to secondary school, this transition period needs to be carefully managed.

During any transition period, it's important that children are able to talk about their concerns and are supported to cope with any readjustments. Due to **coronavirus** we are reviewing the way respond to school transitions to make this a safe and welcoming experience for children and their families.

### **Starting Walworth Primary School**

Starting a new school is an exciting time. It can also be a big change for children and families. For some children it will be the first occasion they spend time away from their family or in a more formal small group setting.

For some children, starting primary school may increase anxiety around separation from their main caregiver. These feelings can also be exacerbated by a parent or carer who transfers their own feelings of anxiety onto their child. But this phase is usually temporary and can be successfully managed through staff, parents and carers working together.

### **What is separation anxiety?**

It's common for children to be anxious about being separated from their parent or caregiver - this is often an indication that a child has developed a healthy attachment to them. Understanding how to manage separation is an important part of normal health development for children, both socially and emotionally.

For most children, feeling anxious about this separation is a temporary phase and can be supported by teachers and support assistants in some of the following ways:

- introducing themselves to the child and encouraging them to play with toys.
- avoiding criticising the child for feeling sad or anxious.
- helping parents and carers to manage their own separation anxiety and behaviours through:
  - coaching them in how to create a quick goodbye that is calm when children leave home for their taxi.
  - helping them to reassure their child that they will be back by using concepts the child understands
  - rewarding children for taking responsibility and showing resilience in attending school.
  - providing parents and carers with a transition social story about our school.

### **Children who change schools often**

Children who change primary schools regularly may struggle with the transition process and find it hard to settle in. Moving between schools can be more common for Travellers, Gypsy and Roma children, or for those whose parents or carers are in the Armed Forces, children with **Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)** or who are **looked after**. Children who are new to the country may also struggle to settle in or feel that they belong in their new school environment.

Multiple moves can be particularly challenging, but even single moves, especially when associated with other risk factors, such as changes within a family like divorce, poor parental mental health etc., can affect a child's sense of belonging to a school as well as their confidence, self-esteem and attainment.

Leaving a school midway through a term or year can also disrupt friendships as well as relationships with school staff and the wider community.

### **A few things that we can do to help include:**

- meeting new parents and carers, showing them around the school and discussing any worries (**during the pandemic this can be a virtual and remote meeting**).
- making sure school records are forwarded from the previous school to pick up on immediate learning or wellbeing needs that a child may have (**a telephone discussion with the previous schools Special Educational Needs Coordinator - SENCo would be helpful**)
- developing a support system that may include training children to be buddies or to provide peer support to new arrivals. (**a reminder of the social distancing rule**)

### **Helping pupils with mental health needs and SEND transition smoothly**

At Walworth we like to make sure plans are in place to support children with mental health needs and SEND to negotiate the change from primary to secondary school or moving into alternative education and then transitioning back.

We are aware that it is necessary to plan well in advance of the transition to address any potential barriers to learning or thriving.

### **These plans involve:**

- sharing information with the new school or collecting information from the previous school about the child's needs well in advance, with the agreement of parents and carers. This could involve formal liaison, review and handover meetings, and in some instances transitional joint working between all schools such as primary and secondary, SEND caseworkers - or school parental support advisors organising a formal handover to the new school involving the child and their family.
- putting in place a plan to address barriers before the transition starts (e.g. equipment, resources, training exchanges and support, behaviour management support, risk assessment)

- Identifying a keyworker in class / school who will monitor the effectiveness of strategies and work closely with the child and their parents or carers to gauge how well they are settling in.

### **Use PSHE lessons to prepare pupils**

Children who recognise change as stressful, and who seek support and problem-solve, often cope better with change than those who deny or avoid the emotional impact of a transition.

Schools can use PSHE lessons to help pupils develop good emotional and social skills from the start of their education. These skills will help pupils prepare and cope with change by focusing on how to recognise and manage thoughts and feelings, build resilience, and also learn how to problem-solve.

[Find resources to support with transitions.](#)

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/>