

Supporting My Child's Transition to Secondary School - 2026

The transition to secondary school is a pivotal time for children. Like all milestones some will breeze through and others will find it trickier. We've put together some pointers to support parents and carers with the emotional side of transition.

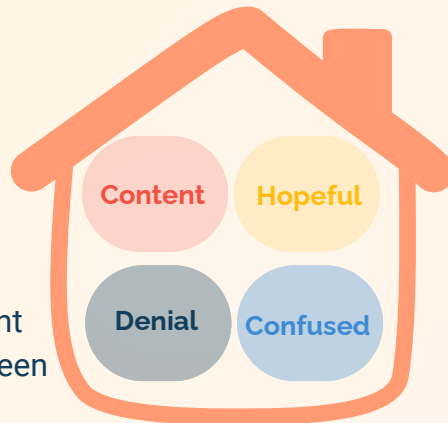
Change and Managing Uncertainty

The change house is a metaphor that brings the concept of change to life by using the idea of a house with different rooms. Each of the rooms is a feeling that we might find ourselves in when we experience change.

We can talk about being...

1. **Content**
2. **Hopeful**
3. **In Denial**
4. **Confused**

and think about the different ways we might move between those feelings.



What can we do to help our children?

We can help children to tolerate uncertainty by talking through the process of what we can get ready and control and what we can't control. This can help make the process of uncertainty feel more manageable.

It's helpful for us to be mindful that we might be triggered by our own feelings and experiences of change particularly in saying goodbye and endings.

During transition there will be movement between these different states for children. This can sometimes catch us unaware, one minute our child is excited and positive and the next day they are in denial - they don't want to talk about it or they don't want to do things to get ready.

Part of what makes change difficult for so many of us is that it challenges our ability to manage uncertainty and it can bring feelings of anxiety as we don't know what will happen.

Often our response to this is to try to control everything - maybe getting uniform very early, meeting everyone, making plans etc. This might make us feel better as we are active and doing something however for some children this can feel overwhelming.

Managing Worries

How we can support children with worries?

- Remind children that it's Ok to worry, we all worry and it's part of being human
- Create an environment where children feel safe and confident to share their worries
- Explain to children that worries can be **helpful**, they can help us be prepared, to feel alert, to plan, to get ready to respond...
- ...but worries can also be overwhelming and **unhelpful** and children need to understand when a worry has become too much and they need support.



Managing Worries

If a worry is too much, we might see that through behaviour changes, for example changes in sleep patterns, eating and friendships.

Share your own experiences of managing worries.

Help unpick the worry so that your child is more able to make sense of it.

Identify what can help your child with the worry - is that a run? A cuddle? Take the dog for a walk.

How can I help you feel better?

What do you need from me?

What can we do together that might make this worry feel easier for you?

ASK

Who helps you feel better?

Is there anybody else that you might want to talk to?

Take a moment before responding - when we are upset by our child's worry our first reaction is to often to say 'don't worry its fine', or 'it's going to be okay', or try to protect them and fix the problem. So it's helpful for us to take a moment before we respond, so we can validate their feelings without dismissing them or trying to take the worry away.

Behaviour as information

Most of the time we are not directly presented with our children's worries. We see it through their behavior and reactions. It's often the challenging behaviour we notice first. So when your child is pushing your buttons, or being unusually short-tempered or rude, take a moment to think about what they might be telling you by their behaviour before responding

Building Positivity

Positive psychology explains how the positives, our strengths, the things that we love, the things that make us feel good are all the things that support us and help insulate us when we have difficulties.

Our **'Message in a Bottle'** Activity - **below** - helps children identify their positive attributes and the positive messages they can tell themselves when embarking on the challenge of starting a new school.

We can help children understand that we can have good and difficult feelings at the same time. It is this balance that supports our positive mental health.



Top Tips

- Remind yourself to separate out what are your feelings and what are your child's feelings
- Take a moment before you respond - give yourself time to consider
- Notice what your child is communicating through their behaviour
- Remember, it's ok to feel worried and there are things we can all do to support ourselves with worries
- Help your child to think about all the things that they feel good about – think of it as the vitamins or the healthy food you might feed them.

Message in a Bottle

We want children going off to secondary school insulated with the things that make them feel good. But before we can do that we need to be able to identify what those things are. For each child this will be different

If your child hasn't done this you can try it with them or simply think about how you can help your child identify all their strengths.

