

Information leaflet

Transitions

Many children living with special guardians struggle with transitions. In most situations the child has had a tough start in life and has experienced a significant amount of upheaval already in their life so it's understandable that further changes may present issues. Professionals can help special guardians to anticipate and think through transitions and how best to manage them.

Moving to a new home

One of the biggest changes a child in special guardianship faces is moving to a new home. Most people find moving house very stressful but moving to a new home without all of the familiar things you have become used to and where there will be different people, even if they are your extended family, is a much bigger challenge. Even if the special guardian is looking forward to the child moving in they need to remember that the child might not be equally positive about the move.

Professionals can encourage special guardians to be patient and treat all of the child's concerns as valid, to remember that the child does not have the life experience they do and that this is a really big step for them. In many cases where the special guardian is a family member or friend the child will be familiar with the home they are moving into but this is still a big change for them.

Often painting a child's bedroom in a colour they like or allowing them to choose the layout of their new room can help them feel ownership of their new space. If appropriate, special guardians could introduce them to neighbours and children as a way to help familiarise them with their new environment.

Friendship

Children living with special guardians may display a range of challenging behaviours that can put a strain on making new friends such as being withdrawn or showing aggression. This can make the transition to making new friends more difficult. What's more it can be difficult for special guardians to see the child being rejected by others.

Professionals can remind special guardians that they are hugely influential in the child's life. They can model behaviour such as appropriate levels of physical contact and how to begin and sustain a conversation just by talking to them. They can also help them to feel better about themselves and others by being positive and using praise well.

For younger children, special guardians may want to organise a visit to their home for new or potential friends for a play date or schedule a group trip. They need to plan this sort of activity well and ensure that they create an atmosphere and activities that everyone can enjoy. They should try and avoid competitive games and instead suggest co-operative activities working toward a common goal. Games which stimulate aggression, such as toy weapons and some computer games are best avoided.

Special guardians should try and keep the play date short to avoid tiring one or both children and keep an eye on them while respecting their child's need to be independent. Special guardians can help form relationships too by making the children feel welcome in their home and taking time to chat with their parents and carers if they drop them off or pick them up.

If the child feels like the play date wasn't successful encourage special guardians to focus on the positives and talk to them about what they think went wrong and how they and the child can fix this for next time. Professionals can remind special guardians to show the child that they are confident that, given time, the child will find a way to resolve the situation and make new friends.

School

Although we often consider transitions to mean moving between schools there are a number of transitions within each day, term and year. Changing class or a teacher being off sick can prove problematic depending on the child and their circumstances.

Schools are required by law to have a designated member of staff in their school that has responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of previously 'looked after' pupils which will include many Special Guardianship children.

Department for Education guidance (2009) states that when children cease to be 'looked after' their educational needs are unlikely to have significantly changed and urges designated teachers to give consideration to the implications of changing a child's support. This means that even if the child was never 'looked after' it is worth the special guardian finding out who the school's designated teacher is and discussing their situation with them as they may have experience of supporting children in their child's position.

Practical tips for professional to share with special guardians

Special guardians should:

- Try and make additional visits beforehand so the child becomes familiar with the school.
- Find out if the school has a mentoring or buddy scheme.
- Ask if they can see photos and profiles of new teachers in order to reduce anxiety. This is important as primary school class teachers can provide a substitute attachment figure for children.
- Ask if there is a map of the school so they can plan routes to classes with the child.
- Ask if they have a nurture room that the child can visit and use as a quiet space.
- Ask if the school offers mindfulness lessons

Key points

- Many children living with special guardians struggle with transitions.
- Special guardians need to be patient and treat all the child's concerns as valid and remember that they don't have the life experience they do and change can be daunting.
- Children living with special guardians may display a range of challenging behaviours that can make transitions more difficult for them.
- Although we often consider transitions within education to mean moving between schools there are a number of transitions within each day, term and year. Changing class or a teacher being off sick can prove problematic depending on your child and their circumstances.

Useful links

Young Minds

www.youngminds.org.uk

Tel: 0808 802 5544

Young Minds is a leading charity that provides information, advice and support for young people about their mental health and wellbeing.

Family Action Head Office 24 Angel Gate, City Road, London, EC1V 2PT

T: 020 7254 6251 F: 020 7249 5443 info@family-action.org.uk www.family-action.org.uk

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