

Information leaflet

Managing 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.

A child can experience a number of transitions in their life from moving house to changing classes at school all of which will need your support.

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 you're looking forward to the child moving in remember that your child might not be equally positive about the move.

Be patient and treat all their concerns as valid and remember that they don't have the life experience you do and this is a 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're 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 you could introduce them to neighbours and their children as a way to help familiarise them with their new environment. Don't be surprised if a teenager spends a lot of time talking to their friends on their phone, tablet or computer – this is completely normal.

Friendships

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guardians may display a range of challenging behaviours that can put a strain on making new friends such as being withdrawn or showing aggression.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 you as a carer if you see that your child is being rejected by others.

Remember that you are hugely influential in your child's life. You can model behaviour such as appropriate levels of physical contact and how to begin and sustain a conversation just by talking to them. You can also help them to feel better about themselves and others by being positive and using praise well.

For younger children you may want to organise a visit to your home for new or potential friends for a play date or schedule a group trip. You need to plan this sort of activity well and ensure that you create an atmosphere and activities that everyone can enjoy. 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.

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

If your child feels like the play date wasn't successful try to focus on the positives and talk to them about what they think went wrong and how you and they can fix this for next time. Show your confidence that, given time, they'll find a way to resolve the situation and will make new friends. Above all, don't give up!

Schools

Many children living with special guardians have experienced some form of trauma. It is natural for most children to think their new home will be just the same as their old home.

Children and young people who have experienced trauma and stress can often have a number of triggers that bring back bad memories. These triggers can include images, sensations, environments or emotions. For many children transitions and changes taking place within their life, be it moving home or house or schools, can result in them showing challenging behaviour.

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 your child and their circumstances.

The good news is that 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.

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 your child's support. This means that even if your child was never 'looked after' it's worth finding out who this person is and discussing your situation with them as they may have experience of supporting children in your child's position

Here are some practical tips for things that you can talk to your child's school about to help with transitions:

- Try and make additional visits beforehand so your child becomes familiar with the school.
- Find out if the school has a mentoring or buddy scheme.
- Ask if you 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 you can plan routes to classes with your child.
- Sometimes vulnerable students can be given specific tasks to allow for transitions between classrooms.

- Ask if they have a nurture room that your child can visit and use as a quiet space.
- Ask if the school offers mindfulness lessons. You can read further information about how you can work with your school.

Key points

- Many children living with special guardians struggle with transitions.
- Be patient and treat all their concerns as valid and remember that they don't have the life experience you 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 organisations

Young Minds

www.youngminds.org.uk

Hotline: 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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