



Supporting children with change

Making a change - big or small - affects everyone differently. Some children will be excited, curious and adapt to change quickly. Others may need more time to absorb and accept change. The big changes are things like starting a new nursery or school, moving house, having a new brother or sister or change in their family set up.

Small changes are things like a change to what they do every day, for example, going swimming instead of to the park. Or there can be very small changes which feel big to them, such as running out of a breakfast cereal they like and having to eat something else.

What's the link between change and communication skills?

Change can be challenging for us as adults (whether it's something we've chosen or not) but we can make sense of it by thinking things through, planning and talking to other people. These strategies all rely on language and communication skills.

Change can bring up lots of different emotions as well; we might be losing as well as gaining something. This can make it complex for young children and children who have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) when they are trying to make sense of everything. They are still learning about how to express their feelings and talk about things.

Children need to have good language skills to understand when something is going to change in the future. This involves understanding time and being able to anticipate this change. Young children and children with SLCN may have difficulty with a sense of time; they can be very much in the here and now and use present tense verbs. This can make it tricky for them to understand what's going to happen in the future.

My child gets upset when small things change - how can I help?

Changes or transitions can be big or small, for example having to stop playing for lunch or needing to go to the toilet. Some children can find this hard to deal with. What can help them is having some pictures or a [visual timeline](#) of what is going to happen in their day or

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routine. Although this does take advance planning it helps children to understand what is going to happen next or if their routine is going to change.

My child has SLCN. What can I do to help them before they start a new school or setting?

Starting a new setting can bring a mixture of emotions for everyone involved and these can be heightened if your child has SLCN. Lots of questions can come up such as 'will they make friends?', 'will people be able to understand what they're saying?', 'will they be able to ask for things like a snack or going to the toilet?' and 'how will they be able to tell me what they've done all day?'

Everyone reacts differently to change but here are some tips for helping your child make the most of new experiences:

- Take a picture of your child's teacher or key worker so that they can remember who they're going to see. This can help them to visualise the people they're going to meet. This helps them mentally prepare for what's going to happen and recognise some familiar faces when they start.
- Take pictures of the setting and the room they'll be in so that you can look at them together and they can get used to their new surroundings and know what to expect when they start. This is particularly important for children who struggle with making transitions and need support in a new environment.
- Ask about the daily routine and the routine for the first few weeks; talk to your child about what's going to happen and what to expect.
- Talk about the start of school so that children are expecting it and it's not a shock when September arrives. This will also help you to know if they are anxious about it and have any questions. Build starting school into play e.g. through role playing being at school. Some children enjoy planning and building their own school so that they can talk about their experiences and hopes around transition.
- Let the new setting know how your child communicates - do they use words, are they speaking in sentences or do they use lots of gestures and signs? Do they speak different languages at home? If so let the setting know which languages and how your child manages speaking and understanding these.

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Any tips for children moving up to secondary school?

As children get older they are expected to be more independent and responsible for organising themselves. Here are some things it may be useful to think about:

- Would it be useful for your child to use a checklist of things they need that day? This means that they won't forget important things to take for school, and will remember things like their phone or money.
- Do they know their new timetable or where to find it? Is it in a format they can understand? For example, would any picture reminders be useful?
- Do they know how to get around the school and where their lessons are? Who and what can help them with this?
- Does your child know how to ask for help? Talking through helpful phrases like 'I had a problem at school' might be a good idea.
- Have a look at [I CAN's Moving On pack](#) for children moving up from primary school.

What do I need to tell a new setting about my child's SLCN?

If your child has any kind of SLCN let the school or setting know so that they can support your child appropriately. Also let them know if your child is seeing a speech and language therapist or working with anyone else. It's often helpful to meet with the SENCo (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) or Inclusion Co-ordinator so that they are aware of your child's needs. Try to give them as much information about how your child communicates so that the setting can prepare and see if they need any training such as Makaton.

If your child has been at a previous setting let the new school or setting know what worked to support their language and communication skills.

Useful links

www.pacey.org.uk have a [guide](#) for practitioners on settling in new children.

www.talkingpoint.org.uk for information on speech, language and communication development

www.ican.org.uk/help to speak to a speech and language therapist

[Moving On!](#) Resource for supporting transition from primary to secondary school

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