

Early Years Transition for children with Speech, Language, Communication Needs and Autism

Three groups of children to consider

- Joining a new setting.
- Returning to their setting in the same room with the same staff.
- Returning to their setting but transitioning to a new class (Nursery to Reception, Reception to Year 1)

The different scenarios we may see:

- Schools re-opening this term (easier to support some form of transition)
- A September or beyond start.
- All schools back / all pupils.
- Children only back on certain days / only e.g. 10 in the class at a time
- Children back based on criteria – e.g. FSM exclusively permitted to attend with Key Worker children, those with EHCPs. Some children therefore experiencing further delays whilst peers/relations attend school.
- Bereaved families.
- Families who have been shielding / periods of self-isolating.
- Parents who are key workers and have continued to work throughout.
- Parents who have been balancing working from home and home schooling.
- Children who have never been to a setting before.
- Children who attended a setting but have since been at home.
- Children who have carried on attending throughout and will need to readjust to the other children returning.
- Some children have siblings at home while others are only-children. How has this affected their lockdown experience in terms of play, interaction, communication, etc?
- Families where one child is returning to school while another is still at home.

Issues that may arise:

Social communication and interaction

- Social distancing will be especially difficult in the Early Years, not only peer to peer but also for 1:1 TA support for individual children. How will this support work now?
- How has the child been communicating at home? There may be vast differences between home and school with some children interacting with a narrower range of people and therefore having a potentially narrower communication experience. Some children may have shut themselves away. Some may have enjoyed the less demanding nature of this more and may therefore find it a shock coming back. The communication rich environment of school will be more demanding.
- Where at home, children may have been dipping in and out of interactions, they will need to readjust to sitting and listening again.
- Social interactions will have been reduced and possibly preferred. It will be hard coming back to a busier environment.

Emotional and sensory regulation

- The child and their family may have been through a great range of emotions, from fear, worry, or sadness through to the joy of being at home and not having to cope with the added pressures of school (getting up early, putting on uniform, etc)
- Some may be hyper-emotional, picking up from the emotions of others
- Where children are unable to recognise their emotions, they may be distressed but cannot understand why.
- Some may deal with situations logically rather than emotionally even where a death is involved. They may simply accept it and move on while others may not understand why someone is no longer there.
- There will be children who struggle with the anxiety of separation from their family. There will be children who do not want to come back to school or those that either had or may develop school-based anxiety.
- Self-regulation may have been easier while the child was at home. They may have coped in the quieter environment, may have had music playing, easy access to headphones, the freedom to use the trampoline and sensory toys whenever they wanted, and will very likely have had shorter periods of adult led learning. Others may have struggled to self-regulate e.g. in a small flat with limited outdoor space/exercise.
- On their return, some children may be in a state of heightened sensory alert. They may stim more in an attempt to self-regulate (e.g. flapping, rocking, verbal, picking at skin) Some children may seek tactile experiences and seek a tight hug while others may enjoy the sensory feedback of mouthing objects, licking or spitting.

Routines

- When lockdown began, there was a relatively sudden and abrupt end to children finishing their school or setting. Going back will be another major change and depending on home circumstances, some routines may not have been maintained This may lead to:
 - Hangry children returning to school. At home, mealtimes may have been more flexible and snacking in between meals may have enabled the children to eat more often than they normally would.
 - Tired children. Sleeping patterns may have changed with children potentially going to bed later and getting up later. Screen time is another factor that may have increased.
 - Toileting may be an issue and skills may have stalled or regressed. On a positive note, time at home with family may have seen some children come on in leaps and bounds.
 - Independence skills may be affected. Has the child been doing as they want / are they used to parents doing things for them? How has dressing developed or changed? E.g. permission to choose own clothes, dress later, undress more etc.

Suggested actions

✓	<i>Detail</i>	Notes
	<p data-bbox="320 327 646 360">Prior to schools opening</p> <ul data-bbox="368 371 1050 2007" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="368 371 1050 472">• Ensure all SEN paperwork has been received for new children from previous settings or medical / SALT reports provided by parents.<li data-bbox="368 528 1050 595">• Set up a video / telephone handover from the previous setting.<li data-bbox="368 651 1050 752">• Make a video of the school / classroom to email home or put on the school website as well as a photo book of the classroom and key adults.<li data-bbox="368 808 1050 875">• Set up a video chat between the parent and teacher, involving the child where appropriate.<li data-bbox="368 931 1050 1144">• A one-page profile / All About Me sheet should be filled in either with or by the parent, including the child's interests, sensory needs, methods of communication and strategies that work at home. See guidance and examples provided.<li data-bbox="368 1200 1050 1301">• Prepare a parent handout, enabling them to explain the lockdown experience their child has had (see example provided).<li data-bbox="368 1357 1050 1424">• Provide the parent with the SENCo email for questions that may arise.<li data-bbox="368 1480 1050 1626">• Based on the communication with the parent and the SEN paperwork, plan a clear routine with adaptations for the individual child's needs e.g. sensory breaks / movement breaks.<li data-bbox="368 1682 1050 1850">• Send home any usual transition information outlining what parents can do to prepare their child for school. Adaptations to this for individuals can be discussed during the parent / teacher meeting.<li data-bbox="368 1906 1050 2007">• Ensure all visuals are in place, sensory boxes set up, fidget toys available and safe spaces identified.	

- Look at how social distancing can work for the child. Consider visual makers, physical supports (tape on floor, carpet spots, use of hoops, arrangement of furniture)
- Prepare social stories to support understanding of e.g. wearing masks, social distancing.
- Make sure all staff in the setting are aware of the child's needs and strategies that will be used.
- In certain cases, a risk assessment may be appropriate.

When schools reopen:

- Delay the child's return if the school does not have all the information needed and all the provision in place.
- Continue with staggered starts as planned but these may need to be slower than they normally would have been. If Stay and Play sessions or home-visits had been planned, can these still take place before the child begins?
- Consider the child's lockdown experience and focus on delivering a recovery curriculum that is child-centred rather than target led.
- Plan what will happen around the freer parts of the day - child-initiated play, break times, lunch times.
- Be flexible with snack times. Some children may need to graze more than once in the session.
- Use social stories to continue to support understanding of the situation (some examples are provided)
- Make time for building relationships with families.
- Practice the new routines of post lockdown – how we space out, how we line up, hand washing etc. Time should be spent on this.
- Give extra time for processing instructions.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for quiet breaks. Create a sensory safe place before the child returns and then make sure the child knows where this place is. If class numbers are limited this may provide a safer space straight away but then allow for when normality eventually returns. • Be consistent with strategies. | |
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Children returning to Early Years / Year 1

- Nurturing start will still be needed.
- May be changing classes / new teacher so the video and book still apply.
- All About Me / one-page profile will still be needed. What have they done during lockdown? What are their interests now?
- Start with the familiar and ground this change in what they know already. (E.g. the same workstation, safe space, etc). Don't instigate change upon change.
- If splitting children across numerous classrooms/environments to provide opportunities to distance, consider friendship groups and overall capacity to accept change.

What can parents do?

- Re-establish routines at home. Consider use of visuals e.g. a calendar, to communicate school days and home days.
- Complete paperwork requested by the school.
- Prepare what you want to tell the school about your child in lockdown. How have their interests changed? What have they enjoyed? What has caused them anxiety? How have they shown their emotions? What sensory behaviours have you seen? How have they been communicating?
- Communicate with the school throughout the return/transition process. Behaviours at home will give clues as to how the child is coping with the return to school.

Additional suggestions can be found in the article, 'The many problems of returning to school' <https://www.seainclusion.co.uk/post/the-many-problems-of-returning-to-school> and some useful considerations and strategies can also be found in the following free course

<https://www.schudio.tv/courses/preparing-autistic-send-children-for-going-back-to-school>

This is an easy to follow course broken down into manageable chunks that can be accessed by school leaders, teachers, teaching assistants and parents.