



From Uncertainty to Connection: *Supporting Emotional Wellbeing During Transitions*

Transitions are an inevitable part of school life—whether it's the move to a new classroom, a change in teacher, or the shift to a different year group. For many children and young people, these transitions can stir up a complex mix of emotions: excitement, anxiety, uncertainty, and even grief. As educators, how we support pupils through these changes, can have a profound impact on their emotional wellbeing, their sense of safety, and ultimately, their ability to be open to learning.

The Psychodynamic View: Why Beginnings and Endings Matter

Psychodynamic theory reminds us that beginnings and endings are emotionally significant. They are not just logistical events but deeply symbolic experiences that can evoke unconscious feelings related to earlier separations and attachments. For some children, saying goodbye to a familiar teacher or classroom can mirror other losses they've experienced, even if they don't fully understand or express these emotions.

Understanding this helps us see transitions as more than administrative handovers. They are opportunities to nurture emotional resilience, build new connections, and support a child's sense of continuity and safety. Using an **attachment-informed** lens means recognising the importance of secure relationships in supporting transitions, while a **trauma-informed** approach ensures we are aware of how past experiences might influence how a child navigates change.

Getting to Know Children and Young People

The foundation of a successful transition lies in building relationships. Before curriculum content can be absorbed, children need to feel seen, understood, and valued. Spending time to truly get

to know each pupil—their likes, dislikes, strengths, worries, and home contexts—lays the groundwork for emotional safety and positive relationships.

Practical ideas:

- Greet each child individually as they enter the classroom.
- Create opportunities for one-on-one check-ins during the first few weeks.
- Use getting-to-know-you activities that are sensitive and not overly intrusive.

Resource: [Fun Ways to get to know each other.](#)

- Involve parents/carers to gain insights into the child's personality and needs.

Resource: [Pupil Passport](#)

Building trust early communicates to children that they matter, and that this new classroom is a place where they belong.

Developing a Sense of Belonging

Belonging is a protective factor that boosts resilience and engagement. For children who may already feel marginalised—whether due to past trauma, neurodiversity, or life circumstances—the feeling of being part of a class community can be transformative.

Resource: Blog: [Top Tips for developing a sense of belonging in your classroom supports mental health and wellbeing.](#)

Resource: Lesson Plan: [Creating a sense of belonging in class](#)

To foster belonging:

- Establish shared rituals like morning meetings or end-of-day reflections.
- Display children's work and names around the classroom to show it is their space.
- Encourage class values or agreements that are co-created with pupils.
- Celebrate differences.

Resource: Lesson Plan: [Celebrating Difference](#)

A child who feels they belong is more likely to take risks in their learning, ask for help, and form positive relationships.

Helping Children Identify What They Need to Learn at Their Best

Supporting children to recognise and express what they need to feel safe and ready to learn empowers them and builds emotional literacy. This is particularly vital for children who may struggle to regulate their emotions due to previous adversity.

Strategies to support this include:

- Talk about emotions, use stories or films to illustrate how people deal with them

Resource: [Emotional Literacy Book lists for KS1/KS2/KS3](#)

Resource: [Emotional Literacy activities](#)

- Provide flexible spaces for regulation (quiet corners, movement breaks).

Resource: [Setting up a Regulation Station](#)

- Talk about Wellbeing and how to look after yourself.

Resource: [Top Ways to Help Teenagers Beat Stress](#)

- Create routines that give a sense of predictability and control.

Ask open-ended questions like, *"What helps you when you're feeling wobbly?"* or *"What do you need from me so that you can do your best today?"* These moments build connection and help pupils feel they have agency in their learning environment.

Co-Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

Learning is a social experience, and a positive classroom culture depends on everyone understanding how to support not just themselves but each other. A trauma-informed classroom is one where empathy, safety, and consistency are prioritised.

Together with pupils, explore:

- What helps us all to feel calm and focused?
- How can we support classmates who are struggling?
- What are respectful ways to ask for space or help?

Use circle times, PSHE sessions, or class councils to open up these conversations. Role-model vulnerability and reflection by sharing your own strategies too, e.g., *"When I'm finding something hard, I take a few deep breaths before I try again."*

This collaborative approach not only enhances peer relationships but also reduces stigma around needing support.

Resources: [Lesson Plan Equality V Equity](#)

Resource: [Top Tips to Building Resilience in Children and Young People](#)

Conclusion: Transitions as Opportunities for Growth

Transitions, while challenging, also hold the potential for growth, reconnection, and renewal. When we approach classroom changes with a psychodynamic awareness, and embed attachment- and trauma-informed practices into our teaching, we create spaces where all children and young people can move from uncertainty to connection.

As teachers, you are not just facilitators of learning—you are builders of trust, safety, and belonging. And in times of change, your presence can be the anchor that helps a child feel secure enough to thrive.

Resource: [Year 7 Assembly Welcome to the Rollercoaster](#)

Resource: [Notes for Assembly](#)

Resource: [Lesson Plan Adapting to Change](#)

Circles for Learning Project for schools.



"There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in." Desmond Tutu

Circles for Learning specialises **in early prevention and intervention for emotional wellbeing**. It uses a parent and young child visiting the classroom once a month for a whole year to weave strategies, knowledge and understanding about emotional wellbeing into classroom practice by:

- Engages and excites both the children and young people and the adults involved.
- Develops the skills and understanding in the 5 key areas that research highlights as vital for good mental health and wellbeing.
- Provides a range of exciting resources and lesson plans for teachers from KS1-KS3
- Provides online training and coaching for teachers running the Circles for Learning Project within schools for the first year to ensure that the work meets the changing needs of the CYP
- Is research based and clearly demonstrates impact in emotional literacy, positive relationships, self-awareness, skills for learning and behaviour.



What the Research showed.

Circles for Learning is based on science and is research lead in real schools. It has demonstrated impact across the 5 key areas that underpin positive mental health and wellbeing with both primary and secondary children and young people. It brings together a parent and their young child and a class or KS1-KS3 pupils to create a time and space to allow them to watch and interact once a month for a whole year.

This amazing experience allows children to understand the development of relationships, how learning unfolds, and observe and explore emotions, share ways of regulating and develop an understanding of how their emotions influence their own thinking and behaviour.

The 5 key areas that underpin Positive mental health & wellbeing.

Circles for Learning is backed by 10 years of development by leading Educational Psychotherapist and writer of the Teachers Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit, Alison Waterhouse. The research has demonstrated that for Primary children who took part in the project they became:

- 89% became more self-aware.
- 86% showed an increase in self-regulation
- 87% showed greater empathy
- 91% showed greater social skills
- 38% reduction in reported behaviour incidents within the schools
- A shared, stronger and more detailed use of language to describe learning
- Greater academic resilience with children becoming more engaged in their learning especially their next steps.



For Secondary children and young people who took part in the project the research demonstrated:

- 41% increase in self-esteem
- 57% increase in positive relationships
- 50% increase in social skills
- 57% increase in self-regulation
- 46% increase in self-awareness
- 46% increase in emotional literacy
- The development of a more positive learning environment supportive of MHWB
- Improved teacher and child relationships
- Increased understanding about behaviour

and behaviour management.



Circles for Learning

Building positive foundations for mental health & wellbeing, enabling children to flourish & learn.

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