

TOTAL HEALTH
West Berkshire



Back to School Better Transition Support Pack Teacher & School Support Guide





Introduction

Some students experience significant anxiety and dysregulation around transitions.

This may include: arriving at school, moving between lessons, entering classrooms, ending the school day, returning home after masking or coping all day.

Although these behaviours can sometimes be interpreted as 'defiance' or 'attention seeking', they may instead indicate that a child is overwhelmed, anxious, overloaded or struggling to regulate.

The aim of this guide is to support staff in reducing stress, improving emotional safety, and helping students access learning successfully.

We hope that you find it helpful.

The Total Health Assessment Team

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Understanding Transition Difficulties

Transitions can feel unpredictable and unsafe for many neurodivergent students, particularly those with:

- autism
- ADHD
- anxiety
- sensory processing differences
- trauma or attachment-related difficulties
- a strong need for predictability or control

Children do not need a diagnosis to benefit from appropriate support and reasonable adjustments

A child may appear:

- resistant,
- avoidant,
- oppositional,
- frozen,
- emotional,
- withdrawn,
- dysregulated.

Often this reflects: sensory overload, uncertainty, fear of failure, social exhaustion, difficulty shifting attention, loss of control, masking fatigue.



Helpful Strategies for School Staff

1. Prioritise Regulation Before Demands

A dysregulated child cannot effectively process instructions or learning.

Instead of:

“You need to come in now.”

Try:

“You’re safe.”

“Let’s do this one step at a time.”

“Would you like to walk with me?”

“Do you want 2 minutes first?”

2. Reduce Pressure During Arrival

Morning transitions are often the hardest part of the day.

- Helpful supports:
- predictable greeting from a familiar adult,
- reduced verbal demands,
- calm entry route,
- quiet safe space,
- visual schedule,
- transitional object,
- flexible start where possible.

Avoid:

- public pressure,
- pressured countdowns when a child is already distressed,
- large groups gathering around the child,
- repeated demands when distressed.



3. Use Low-Demand Communication

When anxious, children may struggle to process language.

Helpful communication:

- short sentences,
- calm tone,
- one instruction at a time,
- visual prompts,
- processing time,
- offering choices instead of ultimatums.

Example: “Would you like to sit at the back table or the reading corner first?”

4. Build Predictability

Predictability reduces anxiety.

Helpful supports:

- visual timetables,
- warning before transitions,
- clear routines,
- knowing who to go to for support,
- advance warnings and transition countdowns where helpful.

Example:

- “In 5 minutes we’ll move to maths.”
- “After maths you’ll have a movement break.”



5. Understand Meltdowns vs Behaviour

A meltdown is an involuntary response to overwhelm, rather than deliberate misbehaviour.

Meltdowns occur when the nervous system becomes overwhelmed.

During a meltdown:

- reduce language,
- reduce audience,
- prioritise safety,
- avoid consequences or lectures,
- allow recovery time.

Afterwards:

reconnect first, reflect later, avoid shame-based conversations.

6. Support After School Fatigue

Many students mask heavily during the school day and release emotions at home.

This does not mean school is “fine.”

It often means the child used all available energy coping at school.

Schools can help by:

- recognising cumulative stress,
- reducing unnecessary demands,
- communicating patterns with parents,
- allowing decompression breaks,
- monitoring signs of burnout.



Helpful Classroom Accommodations

Possible supports may include:

- movement breaks,
- flexible seating,
- ear defenders,
- reduced sensory load,
- exit cards,
- chunked tasks,
- reduced written output,
- visual instructions,
- check-in adult,
- safe regulation space,
- reduced transitions where possible.

A trusting relationship with
a consistent adult
can be one of the most
effective forms of support.

What Helps Most

Students thrive when they feel:

- safe,
- understood,
- not judged,
- emotionally regulated,
- connected to trusted adults.

Support should always be individualised to the child, as strategies that help one student may not help another

KEY REMINDER

A child struggling with transitions is not trying to be difficult.

Behaviour is communication.

When adults respond with understanding, predictability, and emotional safety,
children are more able to regulate, participate, and thrive

Supporting Families Beyond School

When difficulties persist

Sometimes, despite appropriate support and reasonable adjustments, a child's difficulties continue to have a significant impact at school, at home or both.

Where there are ongoing concerns around attention, impulsivity, social communication, sensory differences, emotional regulation or anxiety, families may wish to explore whether there is an underlying neurodevelopmental difference.

Resources for families

● Back to School Better – Parent & Home Support Guide

We have created a companion guide for parents containing practical strategies for before and after school.

[Download/share the parent guide]

● ADHD & Autism Assessment Information

Total Health West Berkshire provides private multidisciplinary ADHD and autism assessments for children and young people.

[Learn more]

● Free suitability call for parents

Families who are unsure whether an assessment may be appropriate can book a free, no-obligation suitability call with our assessment team.

[Book a call]

● Post-assessment and family support resources

Our free resource hub includes organisations, services and information that may be helpful to families. We usually share these resources with families following an assessment, but many may also be helpful to families looking for support or considering their next steps.

[View resources]

**Please feel free to share these resources with families.
Our guides are free to use and families do not need to be patients of
Total Health West Berkshire to access them.**