



# TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICE GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

TRAINS: Transitions for All Into School

**2019-1-UK01-KA201-062038**

FOR THE  
SUCCESSFUL  
TRANSITION FROM  
PRE-SCHOOL TO  
PRIMARY SCHOOL

 **ICEP** europe  
Institute of Child Education and Psychology



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



# TRAINS

## Transitions for All Into School

**2019-1-UK01-KA201-062038**

### Intellectual Output 2 Transnational Practice Guide for Teachers



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

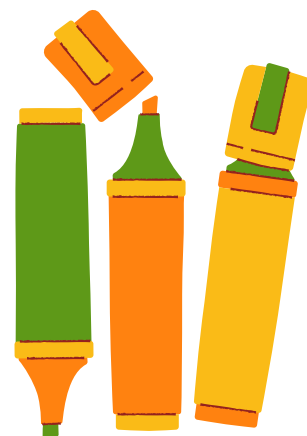


Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Reflections on the TRAINS  
Parent and Practitioner Surveys

Chapter 3: Preparing the Child for  
School Transition

Chapter 4: Conclusion and Best Practice  
Across Partner Countries



# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Welcome!

Welcome to the Transnational Practice Guide for Teachers developed as part of the Erasmus+ funded project titled “TRAINS: Transitions for All into School” (Project Reference: 2019-1-UK01-KA201-062038). The TRAINS project focuses on supporting educators in creating successful transitions from preschool to primary school, improving transitions into formal compulsory schooling and supporting relationships between schools, early years settings and families. This project is being led by Leeds Beckett University (United Kingdom), in collaboration with NARHU – National Association of Professionals Working with Disabled People (Bulgaria), and the Institute of Child Education and Psychology, Europe (Ireland).



## Rationale for TRAINS and the aim of our guide

School starting ages and experiences vary across Europe. The transition to full time compulsory schooling is a significant event for young children and their families, and has been shown to be linked to later school outcomes. In many cases, the experience of transition to school can be very supportive for children and their families, thus setting them up for future academic and social success. However, educational transitions can also be a stressful time, not only for the students and their families, but also for the educational practitioners who take on the responsibility of ensuring that the move from preschool to primary school is a successful one for all children. It is therefore imperative that the staff at the centre of the transition process possess the requisite capacities to tackle some of the challenges which may impede smooth transitions into the primary school setting.

The aim of this guide is to raise educators’ awareness of the challenges posed by transitions to school for all involved. The aim is also to share good practice guidelines and useful resources for transitions with professionals who work with children in early childhood education and care facilities and schools.

This guide is directly linked to our Transition Resources which are a suite of teaching materials designed to support practitioners who work within early years settings across Europe to promote successful transitions within their educational context. The Transition Resources can be found on the TRAINS learning platform at [eutrainsproject.eu](https://eutrainsproject.eu).

We hope that this guide provides you with knowledge, tips and resources necessary to facilitate a smooth transition for all young children in your educational setting.

## **Relevance of the educational transition phase concerning a child's personal and academic development**

### **What do we mean by educational transition?**

Educational transition can be defined as a movement from one educational institution to another, once a child or young person reaches a certain age. It constitutes an event that results in changes to relationships, routines, expectations and/or roles. A transition is likely to involve a change in culture and status. In reality it means leaving the comfort zone and encountering a new place, people, roles, rules and identity.

One of the first important educational transitions encountered by students is the move from early childhood education and care facilities to primary school. This educational transition is the main focus of this guide.

### **Why is the transition phase important?**

Transitioning students often experience significant academic, social, emotional, physical, or developmental changes that may adversely affect their educational performance. Transitions also involve changes in pupil-teacher relationships, peer relationships and learning demands, hence, the implications are much more than academic (Sirsch, 2003). Transitioning from preschool to primary school can be a particularly stressful time for young children (Ring and Mhic Mhathúna et al., 2016). Of course, it is normal for children to feel worried about leaving the familiarity and safety of preschool to make the move to 'big school'. There is increasing interest in educational transitions because the level of success, both socially and academically experienced in transition, can be a critical factor in determining pupils' future progress and development (O'Kane, 2016).

A positive transition experience in the early years increases the likelihood of future transitions being successful. When transitions are appropriately and systematically planned and supported by preschools, schools and parents, they have a positive and lasting impact on children's first experience of school and later educational outcomes.



## Challenges for children

Research has identified various features of school transitions that are potentially problematic for all pupils. These include:

- a different way of getting to school;
- a longer school day and more time away from family;
- changes in building size and fear of getting lost;
- changes in teaching styles, including more structured learning time and less playtime;
- an increase in educational demands, including homework;
- the complexity and organisation of the school day;
- concerns about friendships with a new group and missing old friends;
- concerns about new teachers;
- concerns about new codes of practice at lunchtime and playtime.

Some children may experience school phobia and feel severely stressed or scared to go to school. They may actively protest against going, or have trouble settling in, and request to go home. While some children may display external cues by verbally or physically showing their dislike towards school, others may be hiding their worries and display them more subtly, for example, by often reporting that they feel sick. It is important that educators are aware of the potential signs of school phobia and are prepared to spot children who may be struggling with the transition to school, especially children who may be better at hiding it.



## **School readiness**

Research has also underlined that school readiness also represents one the foremost challenges associated with transition to school by early years educators and primary school teachers (Rouse et al., 2020).

It is important to note that school readiness does not apply to the child only. The concept of 'readiness' which dominated transitions research in the past has been replaced with a broader approach which considers readiness as a bi-directional concept focusing both on the child, family, community on the one hand and on the characteristics of the school on the other (O'Kane, 2016). Not only should the child be ready for school, but the school, the family and the community should also be prepared to welcome the child in his/her new learning environment.

Regarding the child's school readiness, both early years and primary school educators consider academic readiness to be an important factor in promoting smooth educational transitions. However, early years educators tend to also highlight the importance of social and emotional readiness (Rouse et al., 2020).

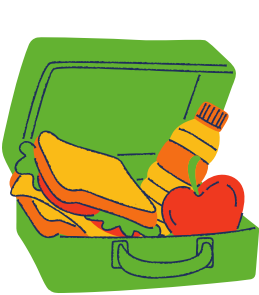
In the next sections, we will explore the particular challenges in school readiness faced by vulnerable or disadvantaged young learners or learners who may have special educational needs or disabilities, cohorts for whom school readiness may be a particular concern (Smyth et al., 2022; Votruba-Drzal, Coley, Collins, & Miller, 2015).

## **Transitions for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND)**

The transition phase can be especially difficult for some children, particularly those with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) or those who have already experienced multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Transitioning can be one of the most difficult activities for children and young people with additional needs, especially if they depend on predictability and consistency to help them make sense of the world around them. The move to formal education may be challenging as children are expected to adapt to a new environment, a new set of rules, demands, behaviours and expectations. Children and young people with additional needs will require daily practice and the use of additional supports will help them to transition more readily and successfully.

## Transitions for children from migrant, refugee and Roma and Sinta groups

Transitions can also be difficult for those from hard-to-reach communities such as migrant, refugee and Roma and Sinta groups. For them, transitions are particularly hard as they are less likely to attend early years care settings, their families may possess trust issues due to a history of discrimination, or they may have little experience with written language (Gilley et al., 2015). Schools may make 'assumptions about levels of cultural familiarity and contextual knowledge' (Vickers, 2007). The family may also lack experience of schooling, or have negative expectations that the home culture and language may not be valued. For these children, transitions bring an extra level of difficulty to an already demanding experience of living in a new country or new area, especially if they are not fluent in the national language.



## Transitions for children with other needs

Every child is different, and there are many circumstances which may affect the child's transition period and in turn, their needs during this time. Some of these needs may be clear for the teacher, but others may not be communicated by the child or their family. Children who may have additional needs during the transition period include:

- children in care;
- children involved in child protection cases;
- children with social, emotional and mental health needs;
- children whose families have experienced a close bereavement;
- children whose parents are not engaged or do not accept support from outside agencies;
- children from families with shared parental responsibility;
- children who have had a change in their family circumstances.



While it may not be possible for educators to know about all children's exceptional circumstances, it is important that each child receives the attention and support that they deserve during the transition period. In this guide, we provide many tips and advice which can be used to ensure a smooth transition to school for every child.

## The Transnational Practice Guide for Teachers

In this chapter, we have established the importance of educational transitions in early years, the difficulty of transitions for some children, and the importance of including the child's voice and communicating with parents. We now encourage you to delve into the rest of the guide, where we will explore the following topics:

- Results of the TRAINS research team's consultations with parents and educators across the four partner countries (United Kingdom, Ireland, Bulgaria and Germany);
- Demands on teachers during the transition process;
- Factors supporting a positive transition experience;
- Examples of good practice in the facilitation of positive transitions experiences.



# Chapter 2: Reflections on the TRAINS Parent and Practitioner Surveys

The TRAINS research team believes that immense value and insight can be gained through consultations with key stakeholders in the transitions process, as these individuals represent the central figures in the implementation of good practice whilst also possessing first-hand experience of where the process may be falling short, at present. Thus, within the TRAINS project, specific emphasis was placed upon the completion of comprehensive fieldwork across the participating countries. This field work took the form of the distribution of two bespoke online surveys – a Practitioner Survey and a Parent Survey. These questionnaires were designed with the intention of capturing the lived experiences of the staff who have supported the transitions process within the past three-year period and the parents who have embarked upon the challenging transitions journey within the same timeframe. The survey was distributed across the four participating countries – the United Kingdom, Ireland, Bulgaria and Germany, and delved into some of the key areas of consideration when analysing the quality of the transition experiences offered across each nation.

Specifically, the TRAINS Practitioner Survey explored the following themes:

- Methods of information gathering/sharing to aid the transition of all learners;
- Priority training needs relating to the facilitation of successful transitions;
- Strengths and weaknesses of the current transition strategies employed;
- The specificities of the transition strategy (e.g., preparatory visits, meetings with learners and parents, etc.); and
- The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the transition process.



This survey sought to be as wide ranging as possible so as to harness the expertise and experiences of educators to better inform the development of the TRAINS suite of materials and ensure that the project outputs were designed to meet the needs of the cohorts they were being designed to serve.

## **Priority needs relating to the facilitation of more successful school transitions**

### **Consultation and information gathering from key stakeholders**

Practitioners highlighted their desire for a clearer and more standardised handover document to be made available, which could act as a “passport” between the two settings. Such information would help to educators to ascertain a more rounded picture of the prospective students who they would be responsible for teaching in the upcoming year, thereby enabling them to prepare more comprehensively for any specific needs that may be present amongst the cohort and exhibit a greater level of responsiveness as and when any of the flagged issues may threaten to interfere with a smooth transition process. Further to this, both preschool and school staff indicated that an enhancement in the extent of the communication between the core staff teams working in both settings would also be of considerable benefit in improving the quality of supports that could be given to the students making the change between educational settings. Regular dialogue between both parties can offer valuable insights into young learners’ personalities, preferences, interests, working styles, and dislikes and anxieties, all of which can leave the school teacher better placed to structure their early lessons in a manner which is likely to engage and help the recent school entrants to feel comfortable and safe in their new surroundings.



Finally, educators also suggested that they would like to explore further avenues through which they could better communicate with and involve parents throughout the transitions process. At present, they believe that the parent-educator relationship can often operate on a need-to-know basis, whereby information is only shared via these channels as and when it is requested.

It was flagged that this was the case mainly due to parents being concerned that excessive sharing of information regarding the learning or behavioural challenges faced by their child may have an adverse impact on the likelihood of the child being accepted for enrolment within the school.

## **Establishing standard practices to foster comfort and familiarity amongst learners and stakeholders**

Another theme emerging from the consultative process surrounded the implementation of a set of standardised practices designed to remove some of the fear and uncertainty that is connected to commencing in new educational environment. This process revolves around the arranging of numerous visits for the young learners to the new setting, wherein they can become acquainted with their upcoming class teacher and develop an awareness of where the key facilities and resources are (e.g., the location of the bathrooms and their classroom, as well as the layout of said classroom and the broader school environment). By removing some of these unknowns ahead of the formal transition itself and commencing the process of relationship building between teacher and student, a considerable proportion of the concerns that go hand in hand with the switch of settings can be alleviated and the overall experience is one which can be viewed as a source of excitement as opposed to trepidation. Equally, for educators, the opportunity to form a rapport with your future students prior to the commencement of formal teaching is an element which could offer considerable benefits and ensure that they are best placed to provide sensitive responses and engage in comprehensive planning designed to optimise the standard of teaching and delivery for all learners.

## **Incorporating technology into the overarching transitions process**

Finally, the consultative process for TRAINS occurred in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore represented an opportunity to determine the extent to which technology could possess utility within the transitions process. For many, the pandemic thrust the use of technology to the forefront of their teaching and demanded that educators displayed innovation and creativity in how they utilised the available resources to offer the best standard of teaching through this period of uncertainty. This reluctance for sharing can leave educators feeling ill prepared for the diversity of need within their classroom each new term, as the insights of the individuals who know the child most intimately are being withheld.

By fostering trusting relationships between parents and teachers from the early stages of the transitions process (through regular communication commencing well in advance of the proposed school start date), much of this anxiety can be alleviated thereby enabling the educator to access vital information that can help to ensure that every child receives the specific individualised support they need to acclimatise to an unfamiliar educational context.

## **Accessing harder to reach learners in advance of the transition**

Through consultations with educators, it also emerged that the issue of accessing all prospective students was one which significantly impacted the quality of supports that could be given to some harder to reach learners. Such groups include:

- learners who are not attending preschool;
- learners who may not yet have arrived in the country;
- learners emerging from families who do not speak the native language or who may be unfamiliar with the educational system having arrived from another country; and
- learners emerging from challenging home environments wherein they may receive insufficient levels of support and parental input.



Better liaison with teams to whom children with SEN have been referred either with diagnosis confirmed or pending. Currently, the extent to which schools are provided with information is determined by the parents' wishes. However, some parents seem cautious about sharing large amounts of information due to a belief that their child may not be accepted in the school. The more information schools have before the child starts, the better they can prepare in advance to meet the child's needs. Based on the findings of the TRAINS research, it becomes clear that the promotion of more in-depth interaction and information sharing regarding all learners, particularly those who may require additional supports or provisions, is an area which requires further attention in the creation of a more cohesive and effective transitions process.



While the general consensus from both teachers and parents alike was that technology could not replace the value offered by face-to-face preparatory activities and meetings, this period did elucidate the potential for technology to augment current transitions practices and offer a more rounded and diverse orientation process for learners and their families. Resources such as introductory/welcome videos, virtual tours, informational PowerPoint presentations and online group meetings via Zoom or

Skype could all be availed of to provide additional supports during the period of transitions and do highlight the potential usefulness of online media in promoting more helpful and thorough orientation practices. However, in order to maximise the potential associated with incorporating online elements into the transitions process, it is imperative that educators are given sufficient opportunities and training to upskill in new technologies so as to ensure they are capable of delivering the supportive activities in the most user-friendly and inclusive manner.

## Conclusion

Through discussion with educators working in both preschool and primary school settings, it is evident that there are certain means through which the educators believe that the transitions process could be improved and refined to better meet the needs of the learners. As with any period of change or uncertainty, the presence of clear and regular communication is key. This is clear in how many of the recommendations for potential improvements revolve around the enhancement of communication between the key stakeholders involved in the transitions process. In the upcoming section, we will outline some core guidelines regarding the ways in which educators can seek to improve their own transitions practices and create orientation experiences that are comfortable, safe and welcoming for all parties involved.





# Chapter 3: Preparing the Child for School Transition

The approach adopted by educators should centre around the following themes:

- Communicate clearly and communicate often:
  - Foster clear and open dialogue with parents
  - Nurture and take into account the voice and opinions of the young learner
  - Collaborate with colleagues in preschool settings
- Engage in comprehensive and timely preparation
- Establish trust
- Maintain positivity and patience to help individuals adapt at their pace
- Be flexible, responsive and creative
- Provide ample opportunities for play and exploration
- Consider potential adaptations that may be required for learners with SEN or additional learning needs
- Make time for self-care



## Theme 1: Communicate clearly and communicate often

### Harness the contributions of the parents/caregivers

Parents and caregivers may find their child's transition to school to be a challenging time. It is important that parents feel supported by their child's educators during this period. Children benefit enormously when their parents work closely with the teachers, therefore, it is important that teachers establish and build a positive home/school relationship. Adjusting to school is easier when children are helped to gradually become familiar with the situation, when parents are well informed about the new school,

and staff have information about the child, their development and previous experiences. Communication has been identified as a key element of successful transitions, where children and parents are fully informed, know what to expect and have confidence that there is continuity between preschool and primary settings (Ring & O'Sullivan, 2016). Parents play a key role in providing information about their children whilst teacher attitudes and expectations and communication with parents and other members of the transition team are highly important in determining the quality of the transition.



Prior and during the transition phase, educators should encourage parents to share any and all relevant information about their child with the educational settings. For example, educators may want to ask parents about the following:

- what their child is good at;
- what he/she likes and dislikes;
- if the child has any special health needs and how they can be managed;
- if there are any issues outside school that may be troubling the child (bereavement, separation, moving house, etc.);
- any other information which may be useful to the teacher in ensuring that the child is safe, comfortable and supported in the new learning environment.

Parents should be reassured that the teacher, who spends a lot of time with their child during the week, wants to find out more about the child and has the child's best interest in mind. This in turn can encourage parents to be more involved in the transition process, to not only want to share information with the teacher, but to learn more about how they can support their child's transition.

As part of the TRAINS project, we have developed a Parents' Guide to Transitions, which can be accessed [here](#).

The guide explains what parents should look for in the transition experience, how parents can support and prepare their children, and what they should be asking about when their child is within the transition phase to school. Please share this guide with parents/caregivers of children who are currently going through, or are about to embark on their transition to school.

## **Listen to the child's voice in the transition process**

The importance of listening and including the child's voice when planning and implementing the transition process has been highlighted by research (Ring & O'Sullivan, 2016). A consultation with the child prior to the transition process can provide valuable insights into their perception (and misconceptions) of primary school and their fears and worries about starting school. This process can highlight areas of the transition process which children need to be more informed or reassured about. For example, children may fear that they will have no friends in primary school, that there will be no play time available to them or that the school is too big and that they will get lost there (Ring & O'Sullivan, 2016).

Similarly, the process of including the child's voice in the transition phase can act as a reassurance to the parents and teaching staff that the child is ready to enter formal schooling. Conversations or drawing activities can be used to explore children's thoughts and worries about the transition.



## **Engage with Colleagues in Preschool/School Settings**

Communication between preschools and primary schools has been identified internationally as both an important tool to support children during time of transition and a useful method to improve continuity in terms of curriculum and pedagogy (O'Kane, 2016). This transfer of information is important in notifying the primary school about children's educational attainment in relation to various goals, information about children's special and additional needs and any other relevant facts which primary school teachers may find helpful as they prepare to welcome a new cohort of students. Parents can also be involved in compiling and transferring information (O'Kane, 2016).

Of course, not all jurisdictions provide a framework and suitable resources for this process. However, if possible, we encourage frequent and timely communication between educational settings. This communication could take the form of formal meetings between key staff members working closely with the learners making the transition, which may coincide with the accompanied school visits which may occur in advance of the move. Such meetings could offer a valuable outlet for the exchange of a considerable amount of information regarding the prospective students, whilst also allowing for clarifications and questions to be posed where the school teachers may require or desire greater depth regarding a given issue relating to a learner.

Furthermore, it may be useful for preschool staff to aid the learners in the completion of an “All About Me” booklet wherein key details regarding the likes, dislikes, strengths and challenges of each learner are clearly outlined. This could act as an important reference point for educators to engage with as they familiarise themselves with what they can expect from their new students in advance of their arrival.



## **Theme 2: Engage in comprehensive and timely preparation**

Comprehensive and timely preparation for the transition should occur both in the preschool setting as well as in the primary school. Preschool teachers play an important role in introducing children to the idea of transitioning to school, and are often the children’s main source of information (apart from their parents or guardians) about what they can expect from their new educational setting. This places a huge responsibility on preschool educators to ensure that they are engaging in timely preparation for this event, and begin discussing this topic with the children in their care a few months before the transition occurs.

Similarly, primary school staff must prepare to welcome new students, and their families. The process of preparation should begin early and, as stated above, a transfer of all relevant information from the preschool and parents should be encouraged. Another great step to undertake while preparing for the transition is the organisation of a school visit for the new students and their families. This is not only beneficial for the children who get to explore the classroom in a casual manner, with their parents or guardians close by,

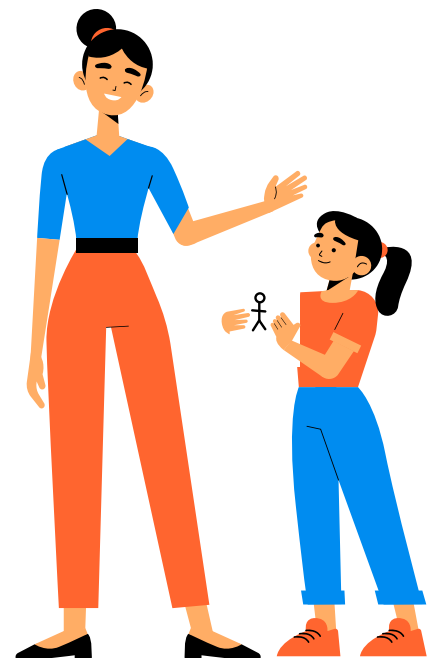
but also to the teachers who can begin establishing early relationships with the children.

Teachers can also prepare a 'Welcome Packet' for children to take home after the visit. This packet could contain information about the teacher which helps the child feel more connected to them (their likes and dislikes, their favourite subject to teach, whether they have any pets, etc.), as well as some information about what can be expected from them throughout the year, the class schedule or the classroom rules. This information should be presented in a fun and easily digestible manner, to put the child at ease and help alleviate any worries which they may have.

## **Theme 3: Establish trust and build relationships**

Following on from our earlier discussion about the importance of communication and collaboration between all parties involved in the transition (early years educators, teachers, parents and the children themselves), it is vital to create an environment in which all parties feel comfortable to ask questions, to seek help, and to express their concerns. Mostly importantly, the children undergoing the transition should feel fully trusting of their new educators, and all efforts should be made to ensure a strong student-teacher relationships are built from the outset. The bond between a teacher and child is important for the child's development and progress through education. Teachers should consider the following when establishing relationships with new students:

Take time to connect with each child:  
Learn each child's name and use it often, especially in the first few days of school when they may feel like they are surrounded by strangers. Greet children every morning and ask them about their news. Take time to get to know individual children, their families, their likes and dislikes.





Check in on the child regularly: The first few days, and even weeks, of entering a new school can be very daunting for children. Make sure you monitor how individual children are coping. Some children may be masking their worries by acting confidently and possibly misbehaving. Others may be struggling in silence.

Speak to the child on their level: A bigger school building and larger class sizes may be daunting for children. Make sure that they know that you are there to listen to them and that they can trust you. Show them this through your body language, by kneeling or leaning down to the child's level and keeping good eye contact.



Provide clear expectations: Take time to let the children know what the expectations are in your classroom. Clear expectations allow children to follow through on directions and make wise decisions.



## **Theme 4: Adopt a patient, positive strengths-focused approach to nurture competencies**

### **Give it time**

The transition to primary school should be viewed as a process, not a single event. A positive and patient approach from the educators is therefore essential. Try to keep in mind that each child adapts at their own pace, and that while some may have little to no issues while making the leap to formal education, other children may struggle a lot with the change of their learning environment. By maintaining a positive and relaxed tone in your interactions with the young person, they will realise that they have moved into a safe and supportive environment and, over time, will become less daunted by the alteration from their familiar routine.



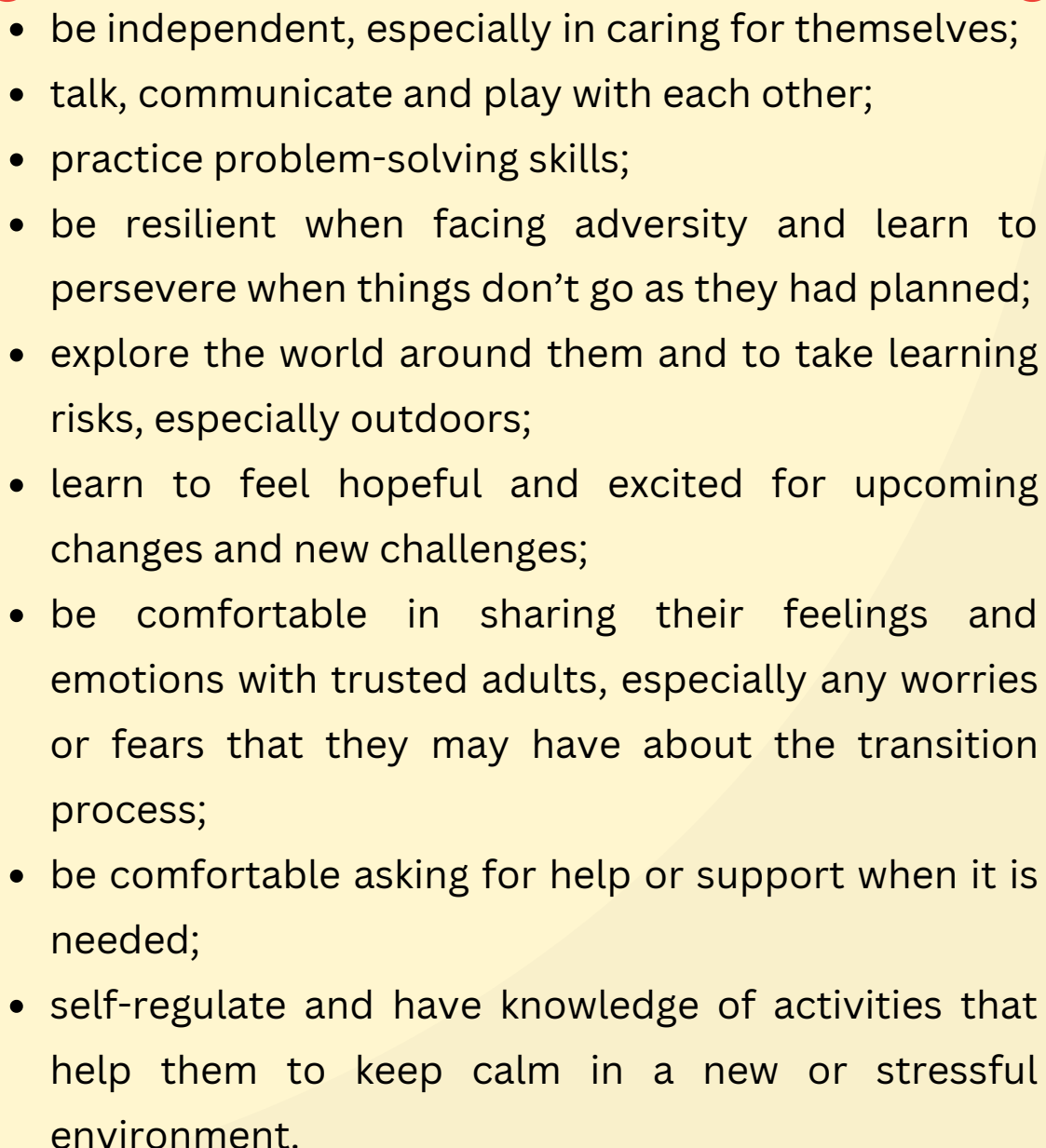
A significant body of research from the field of positive psychology has underlined the contagious nature of emotions (Frederickson, 2016; Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2021; Long & Xu, 2021). With this in mind, ensuring that educators act as consistent role models of optimism and resilience within the learning environment is crucial to bringing along those learners who may be slower to warm to their changed circumstances. Educators set the emotional tone for the educational setting that they oversee, and so, should endeavour to commence and close each day with enjoyable activities that promote joy and fun within the classroom. By doing this, the young person enters the school day on a bright note and leaves the classroom each day with a positive memory to reflect upon, all of which enhances their perceptions of the overall experience.

### **Nurture socio-emotional competencies**

The experience of transition to school can be very supportive for children, setting them up for future academic and social success. While it can be a challenging time, children's socio-emotional competencies can be nurtured appropriately, in a timely manner, in preparation for this big step. Research shows that socio-emotional developmental and interpersonal relationships between children in preschool are among the most important factors related to successful transitions (Besi & Sakellariou, 2019).

Social and emotional development involves several interrelated areas of development, including social interaction, emotional awareness, and self-regulation. Social and emotional skills allow the child to interact in a positive way with others, regulate emotions and behavior and communicate feelings effectively. These skills are important not only because they help children to learn but also because they help individuals establish and maintain healthy and meaningful relationships as they grow and progress through the educational system. Early childhood educators and primary school teachers play an important role in nurturing children's social and emotional development.

With correct preparation and support, most children will settle in to primary school without difficulty. Prior and during the transition stage, children should be provided with appropriate opportunities to:

- 
- be independent, especially in caring for themselves;
  - talk, communicate and play with each other;
  - practice problem-solving skills;
  - be resilient when facing adversity and learn to persevere when things don't go as they had planned;
  - explore the world around them and to take learning risks, especially outdoors;
  - learn to feel hopeful and excited for upcoming changes and new challenges;
  - be comfortable in sharing their feelings and emotions with trusted adults, especially any worries or fears that they may have about the transition process;
  - be comfortable asking for help or support when it is needed;
  - self-regulate and have knowledge of activities that help them to keep calm in a new or stressful environment.

Nurturing the competencies mentioned above is important not only to ensure a successful transition to primary school, but also to prepare the child for future life changes and possible adversities.

## **Theme 5: Provide flexibility and responsiveness to identify creative responses to challenges**

In supporting successful transitions into primary school, it is imperative to state that there is no “one size fits all” approach that educators can adopt to guarantee a straightforward adaptation for all learners to the novel environment. Thus, rigidity in the transition process is not conducive to successful acclimatization. Instead, educators should endeavour to be responsive to organically emerging issues during the initial stages of adaptation and be willing to identify creative solutions to challenges as they crop up. Learners and their families should be consulted consistently as to what aspects of the transition process are beneficial within the settling-in period. Multiple avenues for the expression of feelings should be available to the learners (e.g., drawings, play, or verbal exchanges), in order to ensure that educators obtain a clear picture of how each learner is progressing within their own personal transition journey. As ever, the educator’s approach should be dictated by the priority needs of the learners at any given time, and this can only be achieved through consistent check-ins with the learner to gauge their feelings around their new surroundings and context.

## **Theme 6: Provide ample opportunities for play and exploration**

Play is important for children’s development as it allows them to bond with their peers, to build their self-esteem, to explore their surroundings and to learn the rules of their educational setting and consequently, the rules of society. Children need to be provided with opportunities to foster their curiosity about the world around them through a variety of play experiences, and those opportunities should not end during the transition to formal education. In fact, in recent years, there has been growing interest in a more play-based pedagogy called Active Learning (Martlew, Stephen, Ellis, 2011).



This type of learning allows children to move past simply attaining new knowledge, and enables children to gain a deep, meaningful understanding of how to connect concepts and skills, apply their knowledge to different situations, and spark new ideas (Zosh et al., 2017).

Play exists on a continuum and playful learning can take on various forms: free-play is completely child-led, guided play is child-led but adult-scaffolded and playful games are adult-scaffolded with set rules and constraints for play (Zosh et al., 2017). Teachers have the option to select playful learning activities which suit the learning needs of the children. Some ideas for learning through play in the classroom, which can help children to explore their new surroundings and bond with their classmates are as follows:

- Playing board games and making puzzles: This can help children to think critically and to problem-solve.
- Doing classroom “chores”, e.g., tidying the desk, feeding the classroom pet or watering the classroom plants: This can help children to learn the importance of teamwork, and to build their independence and confidence.
- Playing games like dress-up, hide and seek or I Spy and engaging in imaginative play: This engages the children’s creativity, imagination and helps them to bond with peers.



- Building obstacle courses which require various forms of movement: This can support children’s fine and gross motor skills, help their overall fitness and coordination.
- Playing with sand, water, blocks or play dough: This can strengthen children’s fine motor skills, teach creativity and hand-eye coordination.
- Drawing, painting or engaging in other art activities: This allows children to express their creativity and imagination and to express themselves.

- Nature play: This provides children with different stimulation than the traditional classroom, it reduces stress, promotes resilience and teaches responsibility and respect towards the environment. Nature play stimulates creativity and problem solving skills integral to executive function development.



- Loose parts play: Children's imagination can be supported by taking away toys which prescribe certain play behaviours, and instead providing them with materials such as recycled objects or objects found in nature (leaves, twigs, stones, conkers, etc.). These materials can be used in an unlimited numbers of games and activities and require the children to be creative and imaginative.



## **Theme 7: Consider potential adaptations that may be required for learners with SEN or additional learning needs**

The transition of students with special educational needs from preschool to primary school requires careful planning, collaboration and liaison between the educational settings. It is important not to make the assumption that all learning difficulties will have been identified in the previous educational setting. Students may have problems that only emerge at a later stage of their development; they may have transitory or long-term difficulties and both levels may require additional supports. Schools should be alert to the fact that any newly enrolled child might have unidentified special educational needs.

While the principles of good teaching are essentially the same for all children, including those with special educational needs, there are many children for whom

teachers might need to make minor adaptations to their teaching approaches so as to fully support and engage them in the learning process (Kennedy et al., 2012). For some children with SEN a greater degree of adaptation may be required. The needs of each child should be assessed on an individual basis and appropriate adaptations should be made as a result.

Supports and adaptations are designed to ensure that the student receives an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment and therefore facilitate inclusion. These supports may include:

- The provision of a teaching/classroom assistant;
- Assistive technology devices or services;
- Positive behavioural interventions, strategies and supports when a child's behaviour impedes his or her learning;
- Instruction in Braille for visually impaired students;
- Meeting the communication needs of deaf students, including providing opportunities for direct communication with peers and professional personnel in the child's language and communication mode.

Adaptations may also include reduced assignments, additional adult support, different materials, behaviour interventions and any other modifications that will help the student be successful.





## Theme 8: Make time for self-care

The period of educational transition can be stressful not only for the child and their family, but also for the educator. Teachers can greatly benefit from taking time out to learn about and to practice self-care. The term self-care is broad, as it encompasses any actions taken to improve one's health and well-being. The nature of self-care actions can be physical, psychological,

emotional, spiritual, social or professional. Ideally, a self-care strategy should address all these factors to ensure that all elements of a person's health and well-being are taken care of.

As teachers mostly focus on the well-being of others, they may often forget to take care of themselves. However, self-care strategies are essential to maintain good mental health, and ensure that educators are capable to perform their duties to the best of their ability. In particular, self-care is a great way to prevent teacher stress, which can be caused by a number of factors, like the lack of resources, class behavioural problems or challenging interactions with families. There are many self-care strategies which teachers can incorporate into their daily lives, for example:



Start your day with activities which promote your physical and emotional wellbeing, e.g., journaling, reading, taking a walk outside, yoga, meditation or deep-breathing exercises.

Aim for small moments of self-care throughout the day, e.g., stop to reflect on your feelings when something goes wrong, pay attention to negative self-talk (talk to yourself like you would to one of your students), practice mindful eating to nourish your body or mind;

Make time for your hobbies. We often get caught up in our responsibilities, both professional and personal, and fail to find the time to do the things we love. Try to retain a sense of clarity around what brings joy to your life and remain committed to safeguarding these aspects of your life so that they are not squeezed out by your work commitments. Include time in your day for your preferred activities, whatever they may be.

Set and maintain boundaries.

Teachers often take their work home with them, but it is important to schedule your day to include an end time, as well as time for breaks and self-care practices.

Remember that you are not alone. Connect with your colleagues, voice your concerns to them or simply chat with them to share your experiences, including the positive ones. Speak to family or friends after work to ground yourself and remind yourself about what and who is important in your life.

Practice gratitude and mindfulness.

The Three Good Things exercise (where three positive elements of your day, either personal or professional are identified) can have a mood-boosting effect and help provide a sense of perspective on any work-based issues that may have dominated your thinking throughout the day.

Nurture yourself with self-compassion.

When we are kind and compassionate towards ourselves, we accept our flaws and connect our individual imperfect state to our shared human condition. You can keep a journal of self-compassion as an outlet for your stresses, strains or issues that may be worrying you without fear of judgement. When making your journal, look at your concerns through a forgiving, self-compassionate lens, while also identifying the elements of your day that went well.

Regular engagement in this process will reinforce your confidence in your own professional progress and will create a bank of positive examples that you will be able to refer to for inspiration and motivation during periods where it feels like nothing is working out as it should.



# Chapter 4: Conclusion and Best Practice Across Partner Countries

Educational transitions can be a time of difficult changes for children and their families, but educators have the power to ensure that all stakeholders feel supported, listened to and respected throughout the process. With appropriate knowledge, skills and resources, teachers can ensure that instead of being marked as a period of uncertainty, stress and worry, the transition to school can be remembered as a fun and exciting time of new connections and possibilities.

We hope that you have enjoyed exploring our guide, and we encourage you to view our other TRAINS resources at <https://eutrainsproject.eu/>. Before you go, check out some useful transition resources from the project partner countries below.



## Examples of transition resources from the partner countries

The process of transition to school varies across all European countries, as does good practice in this area. Please see below a number of helpful transition resources from each partner country of the Erasmus+ TRAINS project. For more helpful examples, check out our Transition Resources.

## Ireland

The 'My Going Back to School Book' created by the National Council for Special Education is a resource which can be used by teachers and parents to help students to actively connect with their new school environment and the people in their school. It allows the child to express their feelings about the school, and to include photos/drawings which help them to visualise their new learning environment. The resource can be adapted to suit the child's individual needs. It can be found [here](#).



## United Kingdom

Pennington Church of England School provides an outline of their breakthrough buddy system for children beginning school. This system has been largely successful in ensuring that young children are supported while settling into their new educational environment. For more information about the specific aspects of this buddy system, click [here](#).



## Bulgaria

Transitions can be particularly difficult for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). 'Support Me' is an educational platform to support children with SEN, their teachers and parents. The platform contains an array of resources and activities which can be used to help children with their creativity, reading, writing and mathematical skills as they enter primary school. To access the platform, click [here](#).



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# TRAINS

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## Intellectual Output 2 Transnational Practice Guide for Teachers

Get in touch:

Institute of Child Education and Psychology, Ireland  
[info@icepe.eu](mailto:info@icepe.eu)



