

We can help children cope with change in lots of different ways, particularly if we are sympathetic about their worries, remain positive about the challenges, and celebrate their efforts.



Personal, social and emotional development (PSED)

# New beginnings: Meeting people and facing fears

## Essential resources

- Decorated shoe boxes
- Cards for drawing and writing on
- A digital camera
- Magazines about parenting

Having new experiences and meeting new people are all part of growing up. But the word 'new' can be a bit confusing, especially for young children. Do we mean 'brand new', as in 'I have new shoes', or 'different' as in 'a new little boy is coming to play with us tomorrow'?

Having new things, like toys or clothes, is usually very exciting, but sometimes children find the thought of different experiences very worrying, as in 'You are going to new school

soon', or 'Mummy is going to have a new baby'. Some children may need a lot of encouragement to try out something different, such as eating a new type of vegetable, or having a go at climbing up the steps of a slide in the park.

Making a 'We tried to do it...we did it!' display or scrapbook, and regularly talking about and adding to it, helps create a positive attitude towards children changing as they grow, and can help them meet new challenges.

## 0-3-years-old

Cover a shoebox in shiny paper. Tell children it is called the 'something different box'. Every day put something inside that they haven't seen before, and watch what they do with it. For babies and very young children it might be a set of pinecones, corks or a collection of jam jar lids. For older children it could be a piece

of fruit they haven't tried before, or a different book or toy.

Talk with the children about how they felt: did they like it? Would they like to do it again? Would they like to try something different next time? Take photos and talk with the parents about their children's reactions.

## 3-5-years-old

Children at this age have very strong views, and especially about what they don't like, or don't want to do! With the children, decorate three shoeboxes. Make one the 'what we like box', another the 'what we don't like box' and the last one the 'what we want to have a go at box'.

Talk with the children about their likes and dislikes, and what they might like

to try out. Draw or cut out pictures from the magazines, and put them in the appropriate boxes.

First of all stick to simple ideas like 'I don't like fruit'. Talk together about ways that they might be able to try some fruit, for example crushing it to make a drink, or cutting it up in small pieces, or cooking it and mixing it with other foods.

## EYFS links

These activities can help children to:

- Discover more about what they like and dislike (Dispositions and Attitudes, 8-20 months).
- Take pleasure in learning new skills (Dispositions and Attitudes, 16-26 months).
- Seek and delight in new experiences (Dispositions and Attitudes, 30-50 months).
- Be confident to try new activities, initiate ideas and speak in a familiar group (Dispositions and Attitudes, ELG).
- Make choices that involve challenge, when adults ensure their safety (Self-confidence and Self-esteem, 16-26 months).
- Feel pride in their own achievements (Self-confidence and Self-esteem, 22-36 months).
- Show increasing confidence in new situations (Self-confidence and Self-esteem, 30-50 months).
- Demonstrate flexibility and adapt their behaviour to different events, social situations and changes in routine (Making Relationships, 30-50 months).

*'Talk together about ways that they might be able to try some fruit, for example crushing it to make a drink or cooking it'*

Tear out and file these pages so you can use them again and again

Books such as *Charlie and Lola: I Will Not Ever Never Eat a Tomato!* by Lauren Child, and *Eat your Peas* by Kes Gray and Nick Sharratt, are perfect for sharing the idea that sometimes we think we don't like something, just because it is different from what we are used to.

Over a few weeks, gradually reduce the emphasis on 'what we don't like' and encourage talk about 'what we would like to have a go at'. This can include all sorts of exciting new activities, like paying for something in a shop (charity shops are ideal for this, as they are usually relaxed and unhurried), or visiting a different place, for example a new local library/ children's centre or library song group, or trying a new activity like learning to put on shoes without help.

### Preparing for new children to come to your setting

Make a small display about new children, with their photograph, and information about them: what they like to eat, wear, play with, etc. Prepare a 'welcome box' with the children, containing a welcome card you have made, or a toy or book you think they might like to share.

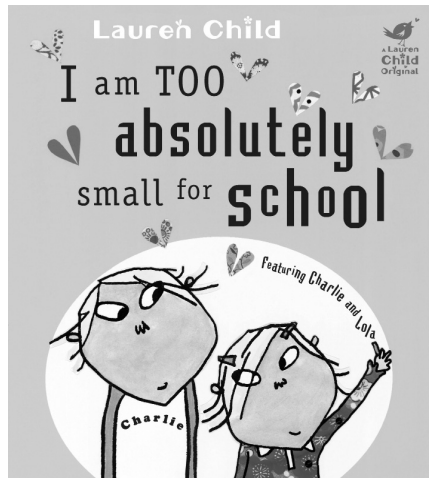
Arrange for a child's pet to stay in your setting. Discuss its needs and how we can all make it feel welcome.

### Preparing for pre-school, school and dealing with challenges

There is no doubt about it, for many children thinking about starting a new setting or school is often as scary as the actual experience! Our job is to help all children prepare for the new, and praise their efforts for getting used to change.

Lauren Child's book *Charlie and Lola: I am Too Absolutely Small for School*, explores children's fears about starting school, and how they come to enjoy being there.

Children of all ages benefit from gradually getting used to change. Talk about going to new places and visit a new place with the children: What is it like? How do we feel about going there?



Could it be fun? Take photos of the trip and make a story/diary about it.

Some children find it hard to talk about their worries, or show anger when you try to bring up the subject. These are all common phases of dealing with trauma or potentially traumatic experiences. It helps enormously if children with fears about change can be gradually exposed to what they might be afraid of.

Take a walk to the school or pre-school while the children are all inside, and talk about it as you have a look. Plan later visits to coincide with outdoor playtime, so you can talk about the children having fun together. Tell stories about when you were young and the fun things that you did. Older children enjoy sharing books about feelings, such as *Feelings* by Ailiki and *Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears* by Emily Gravett.

Above all, use positive words to describe school, such as 'exciting', 'fun', 'funny', and 'interesting'.

Getting used to different adults is an important part of starting a new setting, so invite



unfamiliar adults to visit you, if appropriate, and talk with the children. Prepare the children by letting them know that someone will visit, and talk positively about them once they have gone.

### Getting parents involved

You can support children to cope with change by helping their parents to be positive. Parents can sometimes create or increase anxiety by discussing their concerns with you in front of their children, or using negative language such as 'scary', 'worry', or 'doubt'.

Use the same positive language that you use with the children to help parents. Involve them in the activities described above and explain why they are important. Older brothers and sisters can help too!

Michael Jones, early language consultant for Bedford and Thurrock's Every Child a Talker projects, and Lou Threapleton, childminder in Bedford



### Tips for getting older children involved in helping younger ones

- Older children can reassure younger children by telling them positive experiences about being at school or pre-school.
- They can read stories about new experiences to younger ones.