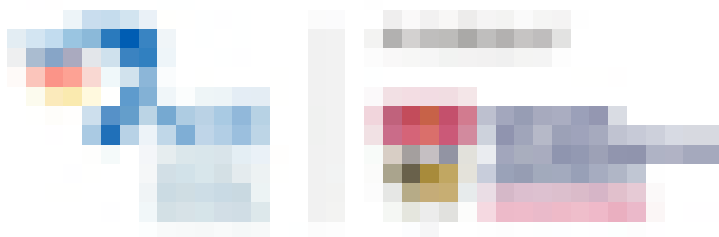


Supporting children in their transition to Primary 1

A guide for teachers and parents in Singapore



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Contents

Introduction.....	2
Why develop this transition booklet?	2
How is this guide organised?	3
Some short notes on	6
... our research process.....	6
... the booklet design.....	6
Navigating transitions	7
What is transition to school?	7
Why is transition to school important in children’s lives?	8
Embracing transitions	9
How do we know if a child’s transition is successful?	9
What are some important knowledge, skills and dispositions that can support children’s transition?	11
What are the six key ideas in supporting children’s transition experiences?	14
Empowering stakeholders.....	31
What can parents and teachers do to support children’s transition?.....	32
What can teachers, preschools and schools do to support children’s transition?.....	38
Summarising the guide	49
References.....	52



Introduction

Why develop this transition booklet?

The purpose of this booklet is to support teachers, parents and other ECE stakeholders in enabling a smooth transition for preschool children entering primary school. In addition, we believe that this guide can benefit all stakeholders in terms of:

Developing common understandings and ways of thinking about transition to school in Singapore

Valuing both shared and different perspectives and practices in transition

Promoting a collaborative approach to supporting children's transition experiences in Singapore

How is this guide organised?

The guide is organised into three parts: navigating transitions, embracing transitions and empowering stakeholders. Each part plays a different role in our efforts as adults to support children's transition to school.

Navigating transitions enables us to seek a shared understanding of what transition to school means and why a successful transition is important in children's lives.

In ***Empowering stakeholders***, we suggest how teachers, parents as well as school and preschool leaders, can enact the six key ideas. Taken together, these three parts can enable adults to be mindful of the children they are supporting. These can also enable adults to be mindful of each other as they work together to develop meaningful activities and practices that support children's transition journeys.

From these understandings, we focus on ***Embracing transitions***, i.e., striving to embrace six key ideas in developing ways to meaningfully support children's transition to school.

We will be sharing with you some of the findings from the survey and interviews we conducted when developing this guide. We do this through *diagrams, graphs, tables* and *composite characters*. Our intention for sharing these with you is to invite you to listen to the various perspectives and reflect on your own views related to the different aspects of transition. We strongly believe that it is when we reflect deeply that we can work with each other to support children's transition journeys in meaningful ways.

We represent the voices of people who were asked for their views about children's transition to school, ...

... i.e., children, parents and teachers from Kindergarten 2 (K2) and Primary 1 (P1).

Hello, we are called composite characters!

K2 Child

K2 Parent

P1 Teacher

In this booklet, we use the pronouns ‘he’ and ‘she’ interchangeably when referring to a child. We do this to be inclusive to both boys and girls.

You will find us sharing some of the views that were expressed in the survey and interviews conducted by the research team.

Sometimes the views expressed represent the combined views of a group of people. Sometimes they represent views of one person.

We invite you to consider the different views and reflect on your own views.

P1 Parent

P1 Child

K2 Teacher

Some short notes on ...

... our research process

The Early Childhood and Special Needs Education Academic Group (ECSE AG) research team conducted a study to develop a position statement to support parents and educators in enabling a smooth transition for preschool children entering primary schools in Singapore. This booklet represents our position statement on transition, and is a product of the study we undertook.

The study was conducted in two phases. In Phase 1, the research team gathered data from Kindergarten Two (K2) and Primary One (P1) teachers, parents and children. We used a survey questionnaire and focused group interviews to find out the participants' views of transition process from K2 to P1. This data was analyzed and contributed to our initial draft of the booklet. In Phase 2, the research team approached several key stakeholders in the early childhood and primary school sectors to comment and refine this initial draft. The research team further refined the revised booklet for the final draft of the booklet to be shared with teachers and parents in the early childhood and primary school sectors.

... the booklet design

We have intentionally included drawings of children and families throughout this booklet. These drawings are intended to prompt us to remember the children in our lives as we engage with the ideas in this transition guide, and to consider how some of these ideas may be useful for us in supporting our children in their transition to school.

Navigating transitions

What is transition to school?

Transition to school is a child's experience of change as she makes the move from her home or preschool setting to the primary school setting. This experience involves leaving behind some familiar routines, places, people, roles and relationships to start a 'new life' in a place that is likely to include differences in routines, people, roles and relationships.

Transition is a journey that takes place over a period of time and is not a one-off event. A child's transition journey begins well before the first day of primary school and ends when the child feels that she has adapted to life in the primary school. However, the duration for each child's journey may be different, and depending on the child's experiences of her journey, she may or may not experience a successful transition.

Why is transition to school important in children's lives?

Since primary school education is compulsory in Singapore, transition is an integral part of a Singapore child's life journey. A child's experiences of the changes in his transition journey have an impact on his experience of school¹, for better or for worse. For example, when a child is able to make meaningful sense of his transition journey to primary school, he is likely to enjoy the learning experiences at school.

Furthermore, in the long term, a child's transition experiences can influence his future journeys in living with changes he will inevitably encounter in life². For these reasons, we emphasise the importance of supporting children's transition journeys in ways that children find meaningful, and in ways that contribute to children's well-being and holistic development.

¹ Dockett & Perry (2007), Fabian & Dunlop (2007)

² Tay-Lim & Lim (2015)

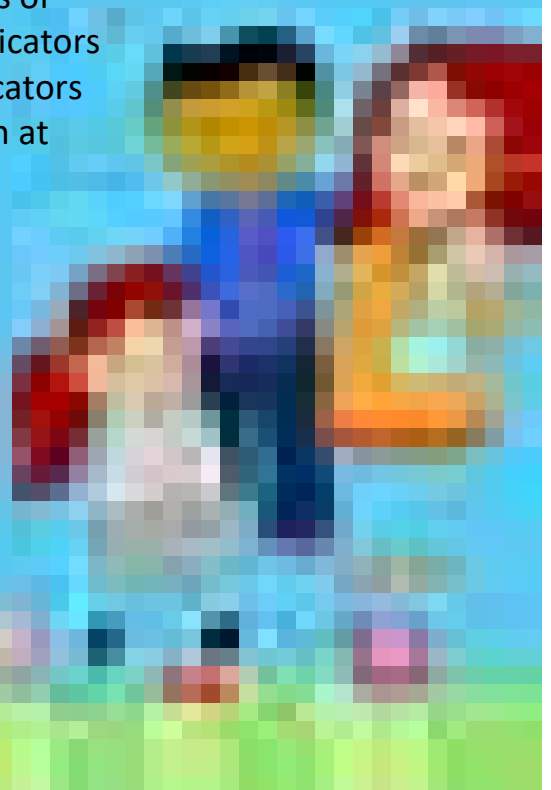
Embracing transitions

How do we know if a child's transition is successful?

A **child is** said to have made a successful transition to school when she is able to make sense of and adapt to life in the primary school. This means being able to negotiate the challenges of her new life at school and making progress in the different areas of learning and development³.

In our survey, we asked four groups of parents and teachers to rate 24 indicators in terms of how important the indicators were to them after a child had been at school for six months.

These indicators relate to behaviours and dispositions associated with a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical development. They can also be seen as possible indicators of successful transition.



³Bostrom (2008)

While all the indicators were considered important by at least 87% of adults in the four different groups, the list below shows the indicators that were considered by more adults across all the groups to be very or extremely important.

- the child feels safe and secure at school
- the child is eager to go to school
- the child has friends at school
- the child is willing to ask if he/she needs information
- the child cooperates with other children
- the child can follow school routines
- the child is pleased with their social adjustment

These indicators relate to children's social and emotional development. They also relate to the sense the children make of their experiences in the new environment. Our survey suggests that the adults placed a high degree of importance on social and emotional aspects of transition.

'I think to me, a successful transition for her will be ... she goes in knowing that generally she has people who (are) there for her, she knows who she can go to for help, and she is willing to just try out new experiences, so that each time she faces something new, whether it's a new subject, making new friends, she will go with that attitude: I am just going to try it, what's the worst that's going to happen. And I think it's creating a sense of bounce-back, a resilience. I am just willing to try and step out and try, it's ok to fail.'

K2 parent

What are some important knowledge, skills and dispositions that can support children's transition?

Research into children's transition tell us that there are some knowledge, skills and dispositions that children need to develop and learn in order to succeed in a new educational setting⁴. This comes from the understanding that transition is seen as a change or discontinuity that is part of children's lives, and it is important for parents and teachers to prepare the child to manage this change meaningfully. Thus, knowing these knowledge, skills and dispositions can enable adults to support children in taking on new roles and expectations at the new setting.

The important knowledge, skills and dispositions can be described as displaying confidence, being persistent at challenging tasks, behaving positively, showing academic competence and developing peer relationships⁵. These relate to the child as a whole, and not merely his academic skills and knowledge.

Research also emphasises the importance of fostering children's emotional well-being⁶ which can support children's resilience, an attribute that enables them to bounce back quickly from challenging situations⁷.

⁴ Einarsdottir (2003), Margetts (2002)

⁵ Tay-Lim & Lim (2015)

⁶ Raver (2002)

⁷ Monkeviciene, Mishara & Dufour (2006)

In our survey, we asked P1 and K2 parents and teachers to rate 45 knowledge, skills and dispositions that they considered not important, somewhat important, very important and extremely important to a child’s successful transition to school. We discovered that while there were differences in the adults’ responses, there were also patterns associated with 11 of the knowledge, skills and dispositions. We recognise these patterns as three categories: critically important⁸, very important⁹ and important¹⁰ as shown in the table below.

Of the 11 knowledge, skills and dispositions, the adults in our survey considered two to be critically important, four to be very important and five to be important. They viewed as critically important that the child is happy to go to school and understands the need for personal hygiene. On the other hand, knowledge such as recognising letters, while still considered important, can be seen as less important. The results are similar to the findings of another local study¹¹.

	Knowledge	Skill	Disposition
Critically important	The child understands the need for personal hygiene		The child is happy to go to school
Very important	The child knows the rules which apply in the school classroom		The child takes responsibility for personal belongings
	The child knows the rules which apply in the school areas outside the classroom		The child displays a curiosity to learn
Important	The child can recognise letters	The child can follow directions from other adults other than parents/caregivers	The child feels good about himself or herself
			The child has a healthy imagination
			The child is eager to participate

⁸ A critically important knowledge, skill or disposition is defined as that which is considered by all adults in the survey to be important AND by at least 90% of adults to be very or extremely important.

⁹ A very important knowledge, skill or disposition is defined as that which is considered by at least 90% of all adults in the survey to be very or extremely important.

¹⁰ An important knowledge, skill or disposition is defined as that which is considered by all adults to be important

¹¹ Choy & Karuppiah (2015)

We invite parents and teachers to reflect on which knowledge, skills and/or dispositions are important to you in supporting children's transition, how important these are and more importantly, why.

Reflecting on these can help us understand how they influence our efforts in supporting children's transition. This reflection, in turn, can help us be mindful of how our efforts contribute or do not contribute to children's holistic learning and development.



What are the six key ideas in supporting children's transition experiences?

As adults, we want to support children so that their transition experiences are meaningful and benefit them holistically. We identify and elaborate on six important ideas when supporting children in their transition journeys. The six key ideas are shown here with the themes that they relate to.

Theme: listening to multiple voices to understand shared and different perspectives

- Key idea 1: Listening to children's voices
- Key idea 2: Seeking to understand different adults' voices

Theme: fostering a way of thinking and acting that values both change and continuity in children's lives

- Key idea 3: Providing children with opportunities to experience challenges
- Key idea 4: Providing children with opportunities to experience continuity with what they are familiar at preschool

Theme: prioritising the social, emotional and dispositional aspects of children's transition experiences

- Key idea 5: Acknowledging children's, parents' and teachers' concerns and striving to transform concerns to goals
- Key idea 6: Prioritising 'settling in' to foster socio-emotional learning and development

Key idea 1: Listening to children's voices

Listening to children's voices means paying attention to children as they speak and act. It is about paying attention to their ideas and thoughts, their behaviours and actions, as well as their feelings and emotions to understand what their experiences mean to them. When we, as adults, seek to understand our children's experiences, we send the message that we wish to make deeper connections with them and strengthen our relationships with them. At the same, we are in a better position to be able to support them in ways that are meaningful to them and to us. We can do this by making decisions and taking actions that consider children's experiences, goals and aspirations while still valuing our own.

In seeking to listen to the voices of children, the research team found that children in K2 and P1 expressed knowing various aspects of the transition experience. These included learning new knowledge and skills, having positive relationships with friends and teachers, knowledge of new routines, rules and structures, as well as independence in carrying out tasks and routines. Some also expressed their concerns and worries such as bullying and homework. Children learnt these through preschool experiences intended to prepare them for primary school, from their families, and as they experienced their transition journey in P1.

One of the experiences that is considered a rite of passage for Singapore children starting P1 is buying their own food during recess. This experience is both a sign of and contributes to a child's independence. Parents and K2 children expressed this as important to them, and K2 and P1 teachers described some of the ways in which they supported children to successfully negotiate this transition experience (which we share in a later part of the guide). As teachers and parents, listening to children's voices here means trying to understand their experiences of buying food from the canteen.

93% of the P1 children we surveyed said they were able to buy food on their own during recess while 78% of the K2 children felt that they would know how to do this when they start P1. While this means that a large percentage of the children were either able to negotiate this new experience or felt confident doing so, it seems that there were also some who might need ongoing support with this new learning experience.

We can seek to understand children's experiences by asking them to talk about their canteen experiences (for P1 children) or experiences buying things in general. We can also do this by observing them when they make purchases in school or while on outings with family. When we listen, observe and talk with children to understand their experiences, we can work out who feels comfortable with this new experience and who may need support with this. We can then find 'doable' ways to provide any additional support that are meaningful to the children. Just as importantly, we send children the message that we value their experiences and are there for them.

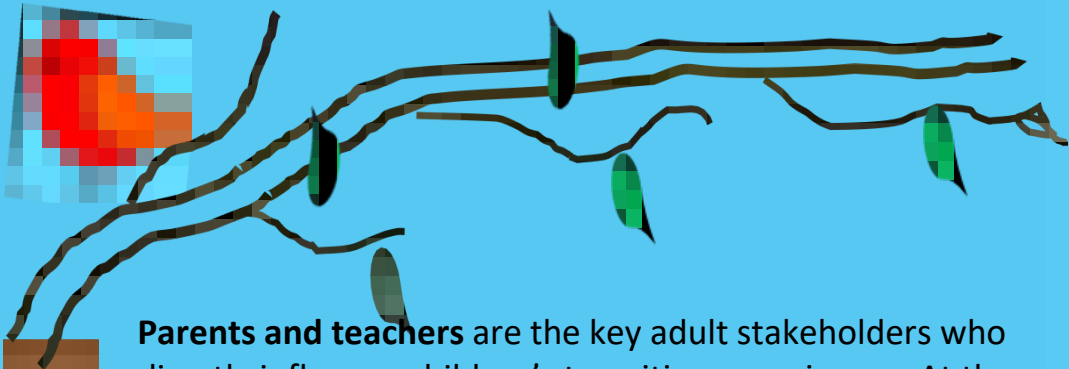
My friends and I know we have to buy food by ourselves. I can use the pocket money to buy the food I like to eat. Some of my friends say to 'eat vegetables' and 'eat healthily'. Another friend wants canteen food to be nice.

I buy food by myself. My friend tells me she doesn't like queuing up for food. One friend also says he has not enough time to eat. Another friend says someone always wants to eat her food and she doesn't like it.

P1 child

K2 child

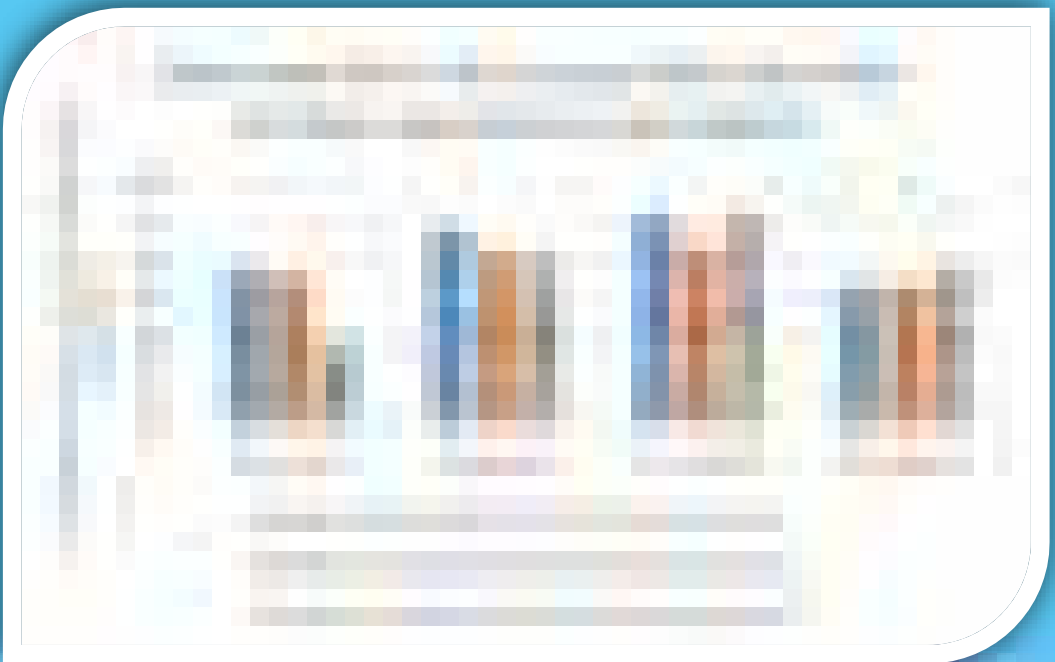
Key idea 2: Seeking to understand different adults' voices



Parents and teachers are the key adult stakeholders who directly influence children's transition experiences. At the same time, schools, preschools and government agencies are institutional stakeholders whose decisions and actions influence teachers and adults, and therefore indirectly influence children's transition.

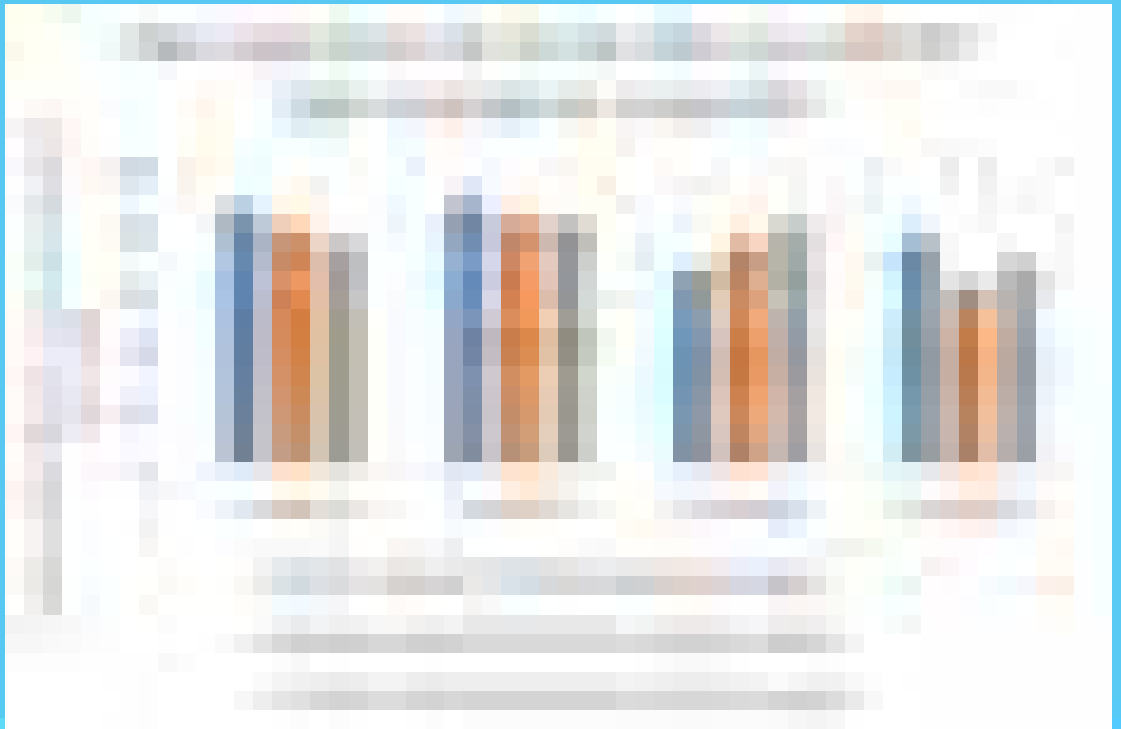
Our survey revealed that parents and teachers had both shared and different perspectives on various aspects of transition. Therefore, we believe it is important to recognise, understand and value the similar and diverse views of individual adults as well as groups of adults (e.g., K2 teachers, P1 teachers, K2 parents, P1 parents) in our efforts to work with each other to support children. This does not mean, however, that we have to agree with everybody's views all the time. We can agree in some matters, agree to disagree on others and still find ways that are meaningful to everyone involved.

To illustrate, in our survey, we presented 24 statements to participants from the four groups of adult stakeholders and asked them how important each statement was to them after children had been at school for six months. This was to find out the adults' perspectives on various indicators for successful transition. The graph here shows three of the statements related to children's, parents' and teachers' feelings about the child's social adjustment¹² after six months of school. Our results showed that while all adults held a common view that it was important for a child, her parents and her teachers to be pleased with a child's social adjustment, there were some variations among the different groups as to just how important these indicators were. More K2 parents and P1 teachers tended to see the social adjustment indicators as very or extremely important (more than 90% said so) compared with K2 teachers and P1 parents (less than 90%).



¹² We did not define social adjustment for the participants and their responses are based on their own perceptions of what social adjustment means.

The variations in the different adult stakeholders' perspectives were more pronounced when asked about children's, parents' and teachers' feelings about the child's academic progress. Our survey showed that at least 96% of adults in each group viewed the three statements related to academic progress to be important. However, from the graph below, we can see that fewer adults tended to view academic progress to be very or extremely important compared with the indicators on a child's social adjustment (from previous graph). At the same time, more P1 parents, K2 parents and K2 parents prioritised the child's perspective on his academic progress compared with the parent's or teacher's perspective. This was different from the P1 teachers with more of them viewing the teacher's perspective on academic progress as extremely or very important compared with the child's or parent's perspectives.



To summarise, our survey prompts us to be mindful that parents and teachers may have some shared and different perspectives. At the same time, different groups of adults may have some common and diverse views related to children's transition. Knowing this means that we can seek to understand how the perspectives are different in our school or preschool community, and just as importantly, why. We can then consider these when we work with each other to support children's transition as suggested in Part 3.

As parents and teachers, we do have some shared and different perspectives.

Key idea 3: Providing preschool children with opportunities to experience challenges

The changes in the roles, settings and relationships that children experience when they start P1 present them with multiple challenges. Change and challenge go hand-in-hand. However, even when they face similar changes, different children are likely to experience different sets of challenges which can influence them socially, emotionally, physically, intellectually and academically. Thus, preparing children for P1 means preparing them to face challenges in their new environment, and enabling them to be successful in negotiating these challenges.

We highlight two aspects of the transition experience that K2 and P1 children in our survey have voiced as important to them when starting school. These are highlighted in the two boxes and represent experiences that the children know are different from their lives in their preschool years socially, physically, emotionally and/or cognitively.

Change in sleep pattern

Children were aware that a change in sleep pattern is part of the transition experience. They expressed this in terms of waking up early, sleeping early and having enough sleep.

- K2 child: Important for me to sleep early. So can wake up early in the morning and not be late. Important to have enough sleep.
- P1 child: I am able to wake up early at 6.30am.

Teachers and parents can support children to face challenges by providing them with opportunities to experience challenges in their preschool years.

However, it is important that these challenges are suitable for the child based on her age, experiences, knowledge, skills and dispositions. This means presenting the challenges in ways that the child is likely to experience success. For example, a K2 child can be supported to sleep earlier at nights by reducing the amount of daytime sleep and engaging her in interesting experiences in place of daytime sleep. The reduction of sleep may need to be gradual for some children depending on their sleep patterns.

Increase in homework

Children also knew about the increase in homework. Some P1 children expressed homework as something they like about school while some others expressed it as something they dislike.

- K2 children:

“Important to do my homework.”

“No homework.”

“Don’t copy other friend’s homework.”

“Must have homework.”

- P1 children:

“Important I can cope with my homework.”

“Do homework.”

“A lot of work.”

“Like to do homework.”

“Don’t like homework.”

“Sometimes my teachers give me a lot of schoolwork.”

It is also important that the challenges contribute to her learning and development holistically, and not just academically. This is because holistic learning and development can support the child to successfully negotiate all future life challenges and not just academic challenges.

For example, many teachers and parents are aware of the increase in homework when children start P1. Some may feel that they are preparing K2 children for P1 by challenging them with more worksheets to complete. However, preparing K2 children by giving them more worksheets to do may come at a HIGH cost in the future. Here are some examples of possible future costs:

- Children may lose their love for learning if they experience worksheets and homework as experiences that are not meaningful to them;
- Children's socio-emotional development may be negatively affected if they experience unhealthy stress due to homework;
- Children's holistic development suffers if, by spending time on worksheets and homework, there is less time for children to engage in other areas of development.

Key idea 4: Providing children with opportunities to experience continuity with what they are familiar at preschool

While preparing children to meet the challenges of a new environment is important, it is also important to prepare the new environment for children so that they do not feel the change to be too overwhelming for them¹³. This can mean providing children with experiences that they have some familiarity with. In this way, children can draw on the familiar and use their skills, knowledge and dispositions to make sense of their experiences in the primary school setting. In doing so, they continue to expand and extend on their skills, knowledge and dispositions.

We invite teachers and parents to reflect on the following two areas that schools and parents can provide continuity of experience for children.

Teaching and assessing in ways that children are familiar with

In preschool, children learn by playing and by doing in fun and interactive ways. This involves explorations through listening, talking, tasting, smelling, trying things out, asking questions, and sharing their thoughts and ideas with friends and teachers. Teachers find out what children know by observing children engaging in hands-on experiences, and then providing children with opportunities for new and further learning that involves several learning areas, e.g., integrating literacy with social and emotional learning. How can primary school teachers incorporate play, fun, hands-on experiences, and integrated learning to provide children with a sense of familiarity in their learning experiences? How can parents support children's learning at home in these ways?

¹³ Bostrom (2008)

Fostering friendships with peers and relationships with teachers

Friendships with peers and close relationships with teachers are important to preschool children. They help children feel safe and secure, and develop a sense of belonging at the preschool. When children move to Primary 1, they leave behind many of their friends and all of their teachers. When P1 teachers support children to make new friends and create new meaningful relationships with teachers, they are helping children to feel safe and secure at school. They are also helping children to develop their sense of belonging at the school. How can P1 teachers draw on the skills and dispositions children already have to support children to make new friends and relate meaningfully with them? How can parents empower and provide opportunities for their children to make new friends?

Make new friends. Be friends to each other. Be kind to friends in school. Be nice to my friends.

I'll have good teachers. I'll have a good principal. Teachers will be friendly.

What do children say are important to them when they start Primary 1?

Friends. I have a good circle of friends. Making new friends. Friends being nice. I need to make friends.

K2 children about teachers

K2 children about friends

Friendly teachers. I have good teachers.

P1 children about teachers

P1 children about friends

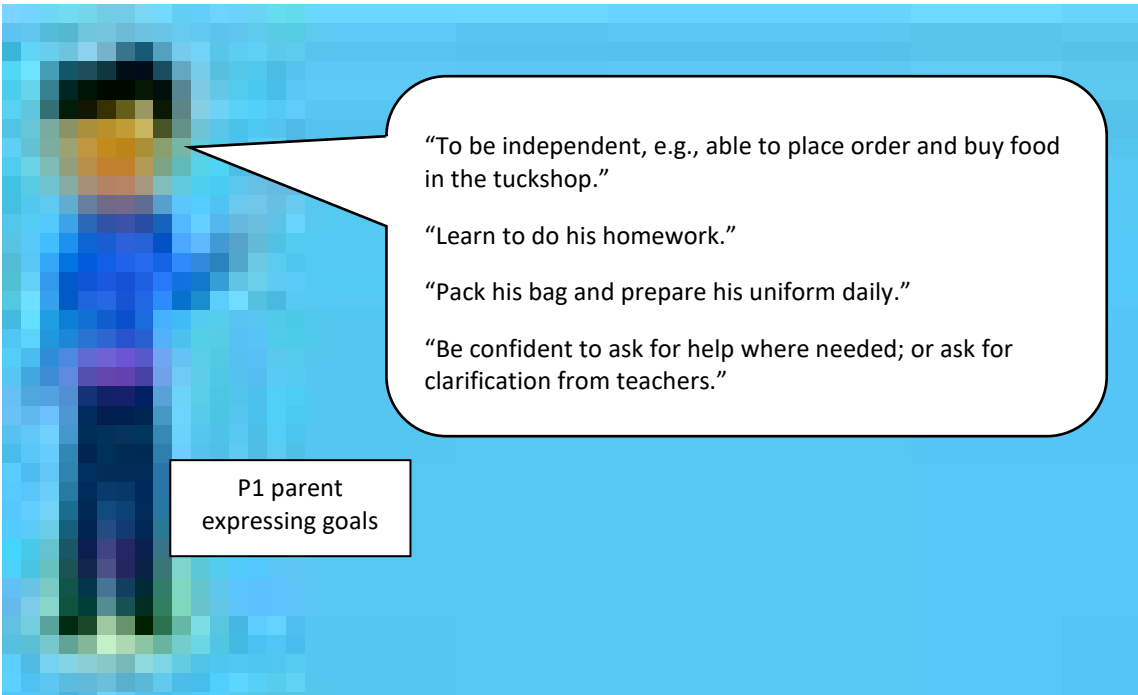
Key idea 5:

Acknowledging children's, parents' and teachers' concerns, and striving to transform concerns to goals

It is normal for adults and children to have concerns, anxieties or worries before and after a child starts primary school. Concerns can arise from not knowing what will happen or from bad experiences in the past. As an adult, when we hear a child, a parent or a teacher voicing a concern related to the child's transition, it is important not to brush aside the concern. Brushing it aside sends a signal that the person's concern is not worth listening to and can lead to feelings of being excluded and marginalised. Instead, we encourage focusing on understanding the concern from the child's or adult's point of view so that we can work with them to address their concern.

At the same time, as adults, it is important that we do not project our own anxieties on children, consciously or unconsciously. When children continually sense that we are anxious about them, they may become anxious themselves. If this anxiety becomes a regular part of a child's life, it can contribute to unhealthy stress for the child, and his well-being may eventually suffer¹⁴. Research also shows that a child who experiences prolonged and/or unhealthy levels of stress is not likely to be able to participate meaningfully in the academic and non-academic learning experiences at school or preschool¹⁵.

^{14, 15} National Scientific Council for the Developing Child (2010)



“To be independent, e.g., able to place order and buy food in the tuckshop.”

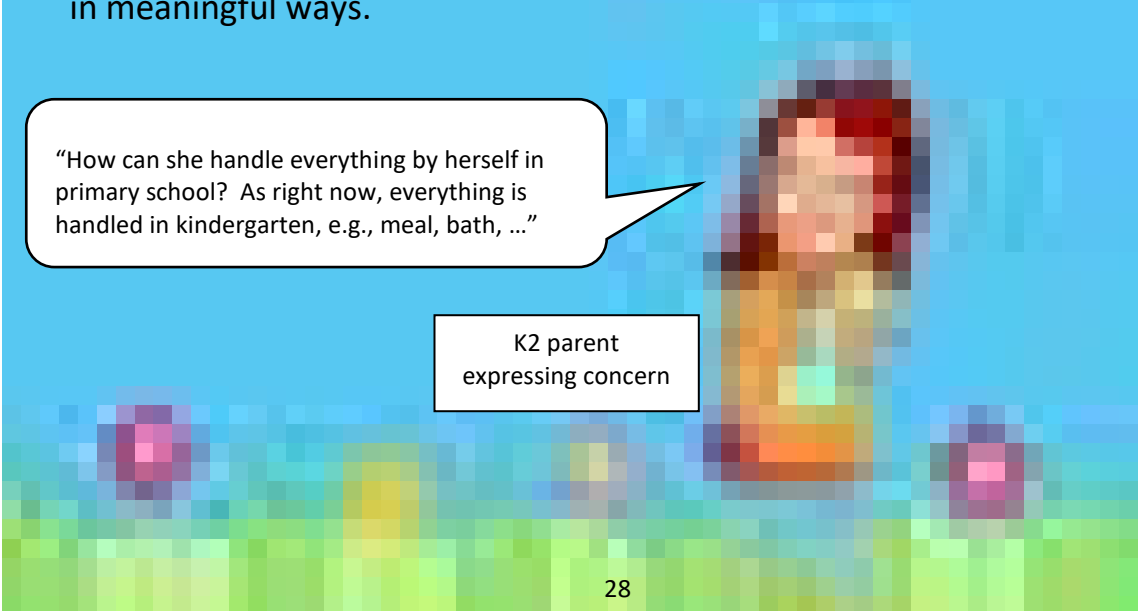
“Learn to do his homework.”

“Pack his bag and prepare his uniform daily.”

“Be confident to ask for help where needed; or ask for clarification from teachers.”

P1 parent
expressing goals

One way to avoid projecting our concerns, worries and anxieties to our children is to change our concerns to goals. Many adults in our survey expressed being independent and adapting to change as important aspects of starting school. Some expressed these as concerns while others as goals; the difference between the two was in the way these were expressed and the feelings that the adults associated with these. When we transform our concerns to goals, we are making a positive change in our mindset. We can then work with other adults and the child to realise the goals in meaningful ways.



“How can she handle everything by herself in primary school? As right now, everything is handled in kindergarten, e.g., meal, bath, ...”

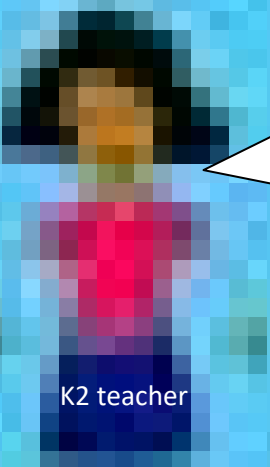
K2 parent
expressing concern

Key idea 6:

Prioritising 'settling in' to foster children's socio-emotional learning and development


Adults can support children in their transition to school experience by helping them settle in. When we support children to settle in, we help them to become familiar and comfortable with their new environment and with living life as a P1 student. Teachers also help children to settle in when they provide children with opportunities to learn in ways that the children have been familiar with at preschool. Settling in contributes to the social and emotional adjustments that are necessary for a successful transition to P1.

When children have made sense of their life as a P1 student and feel a sense of belonging in the new environment, it becomes easier for them to engage in all learning experiences, including academic ones. When children have settled in, it also becomes easier for adults to support children to 'level up', i.e., improve their knowledge and skills to meet the expectations we have for them. Parents and teachers can use the indicators in the section 'How do we know if a child's transition is successful?' to reflect on whether a child has settled in at any point in time in his transition journey.




K2 teacher

Emotional (and) social readiness, without that, it would be very difficult for them to function in the real setting. And that bit the social part, sets the atmosphere, it is the mode for them to go through to make friends. When they are comfortable and confident to speak up. If they can't express, then it's very hard for (the) teacher to understand ... what are their needs, what are their fears, what are their concerns. And if that's not settled, it's very truly (difficult) for them to move on.



We invite teachers and parents to deeply reflect on how their practices support children to settle in. For example, if a school has a practice of providing families with a spelling list during the P1 orientation day in December before the child has started school, is this practice intended as a settling in or levelling up activity? How does this practice support children to settle in? How can this practice be a barrier to settling in?



Empowering stakeholders

In Part 3, we invite parents, teachers, preschools and schools to consider the following suggestions in their journey to support children's transition.

What can parents and teachers do to support children's transition?

- Create a home or class environment that is safe, supportive and inclusive to foster socio-emotional development
- Communicate, engage and partner with each other to support children's holistic learning and development

What can teachers, schools and preschools do to support children's transition?

- Provide regular opportunities for learning experiences that are familiar and challenging for children
- Create opportunities for collaboration between preschools and schools

What can parents and teachers do to support children's transition?

Create a safe, supportive and inclusive home or class environment to foster socio-emotional development

A safe, supportive and inclusive environment helps children to manage their own positive and negative feelings. It helps children create meaningful relationships with their parents at home, and with peers and teachers at school.

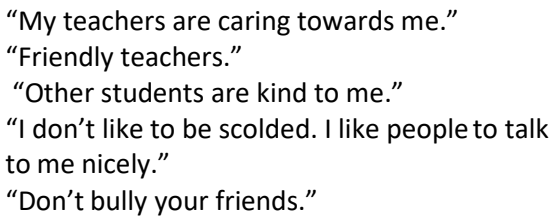
It also supports them to take responsibility for their decisions and actions. Just as importantly, such an environment allows children to learn by trying, making mistakes and challenging boundaries of acceptable behaviours with the knowledge that they will be supported to learn from their mistakes, not punished for them.

It allows children to be different and to have different ideas. It also supports them to value both the similarities and differences they share with others.

One of the indicators of a safe, supportive and inclusive environment, be it at home or in school, is the quality of the child's relationships with his parents, teachers and peers.

With adults, the child is not afraid to ask for help, to ask questions, to respond to the adult's questions, to initiate interactions or to share his experiences and feelings. With peers, the child makes new friends, interacts meaningfully with peers, and learns to resolve conflict situations respectfully.

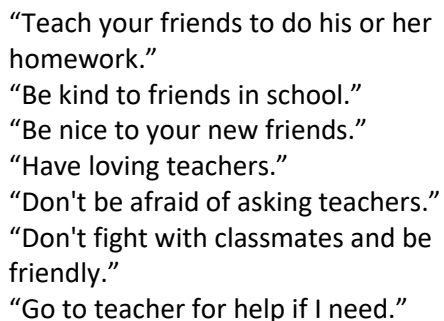
When we asked the children in our study what was important to them when they started school, many of their responses related to quality relationships in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment.



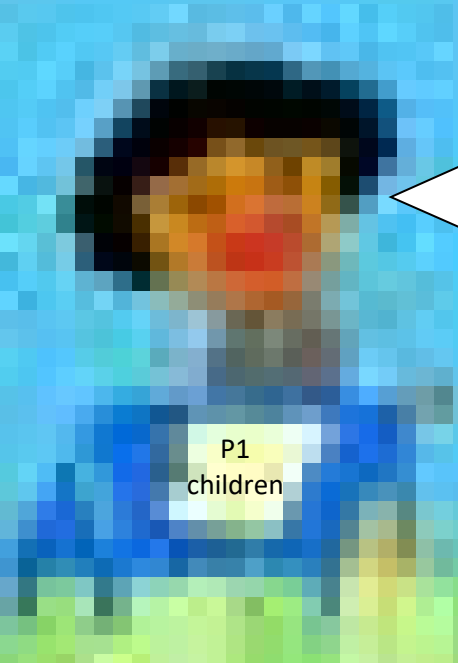
"My teachers are caring towards me."
"Friendly teachers."
"Other students are kind to me."
"I don't like to be scolded. I like people to talk to me nicely."
"Don't bully your friends."



K2 children



"Teach your friends to do his or her homework."
"Be kind to friends in school."
"Be nice to your new friends."
"Have loving teachers."
"Don't be afraid of asking teachers."
"Don't fight with classmates and be friendly."
"Go to teacher for help if I need."



P1 children

Quality relationships come about when teachers and parents take the time and initiative to talk with children about their feelings, and to address their concerns when these arise. They also show their empathy, care and compassion for the children through their words, body language and actions. When children push the boundaries of acceptable behaviours, adults address these in ways that are respectful to the child.

These ways include listening to the child's perspectives on her actions and supporting her to take responsibility for these. By doing this, adults model to the child what respect means, and the child learns over time to interact with the adults and her peers respectfully.

An environment where interactions are respectful can help alleviate concerns about bullying, a concern expressed by many children and parents in our survey. Schools and preschools can develop their own specific ways of dealing with bullying. At the same time, it is important to recognize that bullying is not necessarily the same as conflict situations that can arise when children have differences of perspectives in their play and learning experiences.

At my school, we have an anti-bullying pledge. We teach P1 children what bullying is and we ask them what a bully-free environment looks like. A bully-free environment is a happy school, a safe environment, we have children who are respectful to each other. We have activities to help children recognise bullying, think about what part they can play to have a bully-free environment and make a pledge that they can promise to themselves. We sign the pledge and paste it on the wall.

P1 teacher

Communicate, engage and partner with each other to support children's holistic learning and development

Communication, engagement and partnership between parents and teachers are different ways adults can work together to support children's transition. When parents and teachers work together meaningfully, they have the potential to nurture trust and quality relationships with each other. Quality relationships between teachers and parents benefit children's learning in academic and non-academic areas¹⁶, and contribute to happiness for children and adults¹⁷. At the same time, quality relationships can enable teachers and parents to develop a shared purpose and common ways of supporting children in their transition experiences.

We encourage teachers, preschools and schools to create opportunities for parents to be involved in supporting their children's transition journeys. Whatever ways schools and preschools choose to engage with parents, we suggest nurturing a sense of shared purpose among stakeholders. Nurturing this sense of shared purpose enables parents to participate more meaningfully in the opportunities provided to them. At the same time, all stakeholders can work together more effectively towards the common goals.

¹⁶ Epstein (2010)

¹⁷ Waldinger (2015)

Parents also have a role to play in participating in the opportunities provided. We encourage parents to provide constructive feedback to teachers about the activities, e.g., sharing why they are unable to attend, how the activity was meaningful to them, or what can be improved on.

At the same time, we recognise that providing feedback is easier to achieve when there is trust and quality relationships between teachers and parents; hence the importance of quality relationships.

Some ways of communicating, engaging and partnering for meaningful transition:

- P1 orientation for parents,
- parent-teacher meetings,
- parent-teacher-child activities, including those involving children taking some roles in sharing their learning with their parents
- information sharing via face-to-face conversations, emails and mobile apps (e.g., Whatsapp)
- sharing of learning at home activities via newsletters or classblogs
- workshops, talks and activities for parents, e.g., parent-teacher tea session, talks about transition, focus group discussions

In creating opportunities for teachers and parents to work together, we invite schools and preschools to find out parents' perspectives on factors that act as enablers and barriers to meaningful communication, engagement and partnership. Knowing these factors can help schools and preschools consider ways to work with the enablers and address the barriers. This, in turn, can support parents to be more active in their children's transition journeys.

For example, parents of new P1 children may perceive a barrier in communicating with their child's P1 teachers. This may arise from the different ways and frequency of communication that the parents are familiar with at their child's preschool. Finding out parents' experiences with communicating with their child's preschool teachers can help P1 teachers understand any perceived barriers and find ways to address them. It can also create opportunities for the teacher to try out new ways of communicating with parents or to clarify with parents how they communicate.

We also invite all teachers to work closely with parents of children with special needs. We suggest more frequent communication and interactions with the parents to help teachers understand the children's special needs. Teachers can be more proactive in involving these parents so that they feel comfortable sharing their child's specific needs with them. We invite P1 teachers to find out from parents and the preschool teachers the ways in which the latter have supported the child. In this way, the child benefits because there is a continuity in the support provided to the child at preschool and primary school.

What can teachers, preschools and schools do to support children's transition?

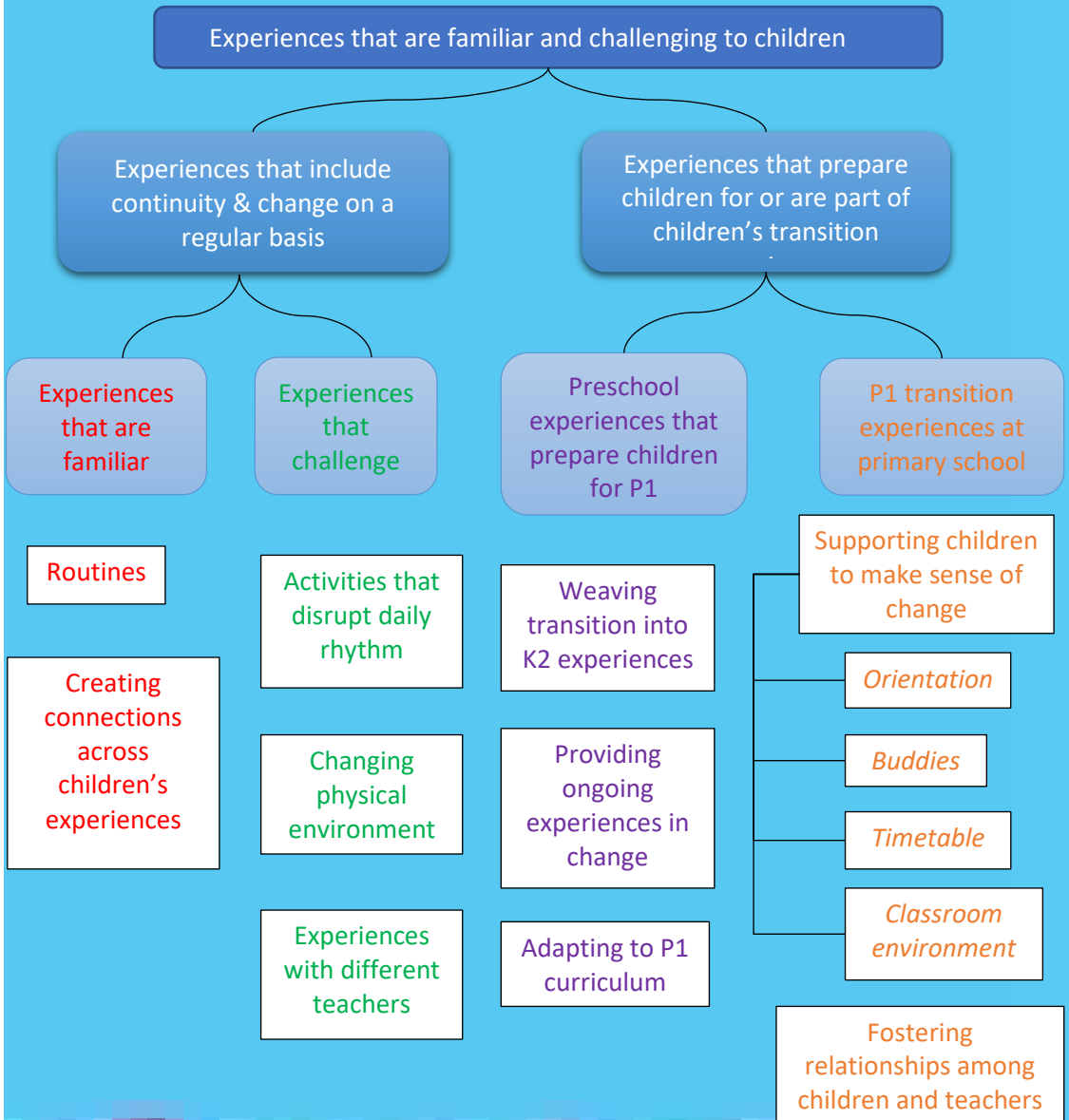
Provide opportunities for learning experiences that are familiar and Challenging to Children

Providing opportunities for learning experiences that are familiar and challenging to children is one way to enact key ideas 3 and 4.

Familiar experiences, such as routines, enable children to experience continuity in their lives. This enables them to make sense of their environment, provides them with a sense of stability and helps them feel safe and comfortable in that environment.

Challenging experiences embody change that can provoke a sense of fun, anticipation and excitement for children. Children can thrive when there are both familiarity and challenges as long as these are appropriate for and meaningful to them.

We invite teachers to consider two categories of learning experiences that can provide children with opportunities to experience continuity and change. The two categories are summarized in the diagram.



Experiences that include continuity & change on a regular basis

The first category consists of preschool and school experiences that include continuity and change on a regular basis. Experiences in this category support children to live with and make sense of continuity and regular change which can happen daily, weekly, monthly or yearly. With such experiences, over time, children develop a sense that life and learning involves a rhythm that embodies both continuity and change.

Some familiar experiences that embody continuity:

- different types of routines such as care routines, thinking routines, transition routines, pedagogical routines;
- creating connections in learning experiences, topics, ways of teaching that are meaningful to children, e.g., making and eating chapatti after reading a book about chapatti.

Some challenging experiences that embody change:

- experiences and activities that are spontaneous, emergent or disruptive to the daily rhythm, e.g., playing and learning with different children, learning in groups and alone, having a visitor in the class to talk about a topic;
- varying the physical environment to the extent that is appropriate for children, e.g., changing the learning centres fortnightly;
- experiences with different teachers who are caring, empathetic and provide a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for learning.


Experiences that prepare children for or are part of children's transition experiences

The second category of learning experiences are those that are intended as preparation for P1 or as part of children's transition to P1 experience. Learning experiences in this category tend to take place in K2 and P1 years respectively. They focus on supporting children to deal with the disruptive change that will lead to a new sense of normality for them. In providing children with learning opportunities in this category, we encourage teachers to listen to children's voices and concerns to learn how these opportunities are or are not meaningful to them. The tables in the next few pages summarise some of these experiences identified by the teachers in our study.

Preschool experiences to prepare K2 children for transition to P1: Weaving transition into the K2 learning experiences to prepare children for change	
<i>What are some examples?</i>	<i>What are some comments from teachers?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to primary school • Activities to enable children to deal with money and buy things, e.g., buying food from tuckshop, buying items from supermarket • Project-based learning on transition, including sharing of feelings and knowledge about school and starting school • Visits by P1 pupils/siblings or school principal to share about primary school life • Independence camp • Graduation party 	<p>We have an "independence camp which involves children staying overnight in school and being encouraged to bathe and dress by themselves with minimal assistance from teachers."</p>

Preschool experiences to prepare K2 children for transition to P1:

Providing ongoing experiences in change throughout preschool

What are some examples?	What are some comments from teachers?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Change of teacher(s) each year• Ongoing opportunities to explore• Transition activities from nursery to kindergarten 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Children in my setting are always given ample opportunity to explore. Hence, it become their second nature to try out new things. Children must understand that changes are inevitable and it is constant.”• “(W)e help children to progress from nursery to kindergarten; we are doing transition at the beginning already. We let the preschool (children) to have a chance to speak to the nursery children. We told the K1 children, there will be some nursery children coming in to join you for the short story. They will join. You can share with them, what is the thing you can look out for. (T)he nursery kids look at the K1 children (and observe that) they speak in Mandarin, you have (to) sit cross-legged, when you want to talk, you have to raise your hand, listen carefully, cannot talk, must respect teacher. I am surprised that K1 children can say this to them. ... Children can advise one another.”

Preschool experiences to prepare K2 children for transition to P1:

Adapting to the P1 curriculum

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incorporating learning of content areas that teachers anticipate children will need to know in P1 in math and literacy• Incorporating skills that teachers anticipate children will need in P1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Ensure that children can grasp math concepts, able to write names, able to work independently”• “Term 4 curriculum is ‘Getting Ready for School’. Children are exposed to number bonds, telling time, money exchange and topic on bullying and feelings.”• “(W)e do a lot of show and tell in (pre)school. ... We prepare them for show and tell. So when children are in primary school, show and tell, they have no problem. Just stand up and share. So some teachers from (the) primary school feedback (that) children are quite confident. Those children ... are quite well-prepared.”
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Primary school learning experiences to support children's transition to P1:

Supporting children to make sense of the change at the start of P1

<i>What are some examples?</i>	<i>What are some comments from teachers?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• P1 orientation with a diversity of purposes, durations and activities/experiences• Providing P1 children with buddies from an older level, with variations in the role of the buddies and how long the buddies support the P1 children• Timetable changes to start school later and end earlier in the first week of school so that children attend 4 hours of school which is similar to kindergarten hours• Setting the classroom environment to be similar to a preschool environment, e.g., with learning corners, tables and chairs arranged as in preschool and suitable for the P1 child• No homework for at least the first two weeks of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “We have an orientation program prior to the first day of starting school. Pupils are shown around the school and parents get to know the form teachers. On the first few days of school, pupils go through another orientation programme whereby students were brought to various areas and guided by the teachers. They also have bonding games and programmes to facilitate bonding with their peers and form and co-form teachers. In addition, they will be buddied with senior students during recess.”• “First 2 weeks of school were used to help the primary 1 pupils to familiarize and to be used to primary school.”• “P4 children would act as buddy for each P1 child (same gender, same race) during recess.”• “(A) P5 pupils is attached to a P1 pupil during recess to help them buy food or what they can do during recess.”• “My school has a buddy system whereby the upper primary (P4) will be paired up with the P1 and then it works well in a way that these children, P1 children, are comfortable with the P4 buddies. They would know the school environment well and within one week, they are comfortable in the school. Within one week, they can buy their own food.”• “The 1st 2 weeks of focus is on the settling in and getting to know the new environment and the people around them so with no homework in place, they need not worry about their work.”



Primary school learning experiences to support children's transition to P1:
Experiences to foster relationships among teachers and children in the class

What are some examples?	What are some comments from teachers?
Games, bonding activities and ice-breaker activities to get to know each other	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "For the first few days of school, they play ice-breakers to get to know their classmates and teachers better."• "Bonding activities for the first three days."• "First of all, they must know each other. So we will have like ... activities for them to know each other. For example, circle time for them to introduce themselves. Find out what's their friend's name, where do they live ... It somehow or rather breaks the ice, made them more relaxed because if you don't know the people around you, you will feel awkward. So it starts with the class first. Then by the level. They come to the hall together because they share same experience when they see the people around them having the same experience. Probably they will feel better after that."



Whatever experiences schools and preschools provide to support children's transitions, we encourage teachers to provide these opportunities in ways that enable children to continue to enjoy learning.

Enjoyable experiences in learning, both in terms of academic and non-academic experiences, support children's social and emotional development at the same time that they nurture children's confidence and competence as learners. For example, teachers can consider what experiences are fun and meaningful to children when learning phonics, number bonds in math, spelling and sight words, etc.

At the same time, teachers can consider other ways for children to do homework to reduce the over-reliance on worksheets and paper-and-pen activities since an over-emphasis on these does not support children's holistic learning and development. Some examples of fun ways for learning and homework include doing puzzles, as well as playing and/or modifying card or board games where children interact with their peers and family members.



*Create opportunities for collaboration
between schools and preschools*

Creating opportunities for collaboration enables teachers from schools and preschools to learn from and with each other in their efforts to support children's settling in experiences.

By listening to understand each other's perspectives, both parties can get to know each other's curriculum, pedagogies and assessment practices better. They can then strive to provide both familiarity and challenges for the children they teach in ways that are appropriate. These opportunities can also help to reduce the concerns they may have had previously, and give rise to a commitment to work together on an ongoing basis.

We recognise that there are many possible ways schools and preschools can work together, and we invite teachers to explore those possibilities. At the same time, we wish to share some possible ways that have emerged from our survey and interviews with teachers.

K2
teacher

- Our most effective transition activity is a “fieldtrip to a primary school. It is a community partnership programme (CPP) between a primary school and our childcarecentre.”
- “Once we (had) a primary school teacher who came ... attached to us for two days. As she observed, we communicated and interacted. We realised that some of the things we are doing, they may not necessarily be doing in primary school. So if you have that understanding, (you) may actually tweak the curriculum in a way that can change a little, put in things that are more relevant.” The teacher can bring knowledge back to herschool,e.g. they could understand some of children’s differences in behaviours or how they express their need through their behaviour ... “like when a child does not have enough rest, they are a little bit edgy.”

Possible ways to collaborate	Some examples
Teachers in school and preschool work together to organise visits/activities involving children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K2 children visit primary school with their teachers to experience a school environment • K2 children attend or participate in a primary school activity with their teachers to experience a school activity • P1 children visit a preschool with their teachers to share their experiences • Older primary school children visit or participate in a preschool activity to support children’s confidence
Teachers in preschool and school spend time in each other’s environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K2 and P1 teachers visit each other’s setting • P1 and K2 teachers experience an attachment at each other’s setting • K2 or P1 teachers participate in an activity at the other setting, e.g., parent talk
Teachers from both settings share information with each other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P1 and K2 teachers meet to share information about curriculum, assessment and pedagogy • K2 teachers share information with P1 teachers about children who are going to the school to enable P1 teachers to know the children better • P1 teachers contact preschool teachers about individual children to better understand the child

Whatever ways school and preschool teachers choose, we suggest both parties work together to consider the following questions:

- What are the goals, purposes and objectives of working together?
- How do children benefit from this? How do teachers and/or parents benefit from this? How do the school and preschool benefit from this?
- What are some issues or concerns that may need to be addressed? What are children's, parents' and teachers' concerns?
- What resources are needed and available for this to be successful?

“Our school collaborates with neighbouring kindergartens to hold Primary School Experience. Children are also invited to showcase their talents as a class during festive celebrations such as CNY and National Day. Pupil ambassadors from upper primary level visit kindergartens for storytelling projects.”

“Pupils from our CCA -Science Club mainly upper primary pupils collaborate with our neighbouring kindergartens to learn and explore more about Science.”

P1
teacher

Summarising the guide

In this guide, we have shared what transition to school means and why a successful transition is important in children's lives, now and in the future. We have invited you to reflect on how you would know when a child has successfully transitioned, and what knowledge, skills and dispositions can support children's transition. We have expressed six key ideas that can meaningfully support children's transition experiences, and we have suggested ways to enact these key ideas.

Navigating transition

What is transition to school? The change that children experience when they start P1.

Why is transition to school important in children's lives? Children's transition experiences influence their learning and development in school, and their experience in future changes.

Embracing transition

How do we know if a child's transition is successful? When the child is able to negotiate the challenges at school and make progress in different areas of learning and development.

What are important knowledge, skills and dispositions that can support children's transition? Displaying confidence, being persistent at challenging tasks, behaving positively, showing academic competence and developing peer relationships.

What are the six key ideas when supporting children's transition experiences?

- Key idea 1: Listening to children's voices
- Key idea 2: Seeking to understand different adults' voices
- Key idea 3: Providing preschool children with opportunities to experience challenges
- Key idea 4: Providing P1 children with opportunities to experience continuity with what they are familiar at preschool
- Key idea 5: Acknowledging children's, parents' and teachers' concerns, and striving to transform concerns to goals
- Key idea 6: Prioritising 'settling in' to foster socio-emotional learning and development

Empowering stakeholders

What are some ways to support children's transition to school?

- Parents and teachers create a safe, supportive and inclusive home or classroom environment to foster learning and social and emotional development.
- Teachers and parents work with each other to support children's transition experiences.
- Teachers, schools and preschools provide children with opportunities for learning experiences that are familiar and challenging.
- Teachers from preschools and schools create opportunities for collaborating with each other.

Throughout the guide, we focus on the importance of listening to the multiple voices of children, parents and teachers to cultivate a disposition for valuing shared and diverse perspectives related to transition.

Cultivating shared perspectives can enable us to negotiate some common goals while fostering diverse perspectives can enable us to learn from one another and be creative in achieving the common goals.

In this way, teachers, parents and children in a particular setting can work together to craft transition strategies, practices and activities that are meaningful to everyone in that setting.

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