

**Changing Social Worker**

**Children’s Advice for Professionals**

**Introduction**

**As we know, transitions are an important time for children.\* We know changes of relationship can impact positively or negatively and can also be trigger for a trauma response. To ensure that the transition from one social worker to another is as smooth as possible we have noted some of the key areas to consider and provided advice which will benefit practitioners as well as children.**

**Views of children in care and apprentices in the Participation Team have been sought to help us understand and improve the experience for children when a social worker or key professional needs to change.**

**Feedback was sought from Kent’s Children in Care Councils about “Changing Social Worker and Positive Endings” in February 2023. Here are some of their views:**

* *“*Some social workers talk to you about when and why they are leaving whilst others just disappear.”
* “It’s upsetting and annoying when my social worker leaves. It’s taken time to develop trust with them and it hurts having to repeat my story every time for the new social worker. I’ve lost count of how many I have had.”
* “When your social worker leaves without saying goodbye, it makes you sad.”
* “There’s no point building a relationship with your social worker as they just leave all of a sudden.”
* “A bad handover between workers really affects us. I would still interact with workers but struggle to trust that they would stay and support me.”
* “Social workers should give young people a treat or do something special with them before they leave to make it special.”
* When there is a “good” handover, you:
* “Get to know them more”.
* “Feel more comfortable around them”.
* “Helps break the ice”.
* “You can trust them more”.

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| What children said | What we need to do  |
| I need to know why I am getting a new worker, that it’s not my fault. What things will they be asking me? | We need to make sure children know why their worker is changing, how it will happen and what the new worker will be doing. We also need to tell them if there is anyone else who will be visiting and why. |
| I need to know when all of this is happening. | We need to be clear with children about when things will happen e.g., the dates of the change and introduction visit, when others will be told and ask how they want to know updates e.g., face to face, text, WhatsApp message, email.  |
| My new worker needs to know my story, so I don’t have to tell it again. They need to know who my family are, my culture, identity, interests, phobias, likes, dislikes and goals.I think you should ask me what I particularly want shared with my new worker. | We need to ensure that there is an updated file before the transfer which has an informative chronology, recent assessment, latest plan, updated case summary and the wishes, interests and personality of the child are noted. The new worker needs to speak to the current worker before the transfer, read the case file and ask any questions and attend the transfer meeting. If the current worker has left suddenly or is off sick, they will speak to their manager. **Remember the file is not the whole picture and things can change. It is important as the new worker you get to know the child themselves.** |
| I need my new worker to know what I like to do when I talk to them and how best to communicate with me.My new worker needs to understand how best to react if I feel angry or upset, if I need space and how I like to be praised or rewarded. | When transferring there is a need to ensure that the new worker is clear about any specific tools / approaches that the child likes to complete, or not. If there are particular strategies that work best with them or behaviours that the child may present with this needs to be clear within the case summary, enabling the best approach to be adopted by the new worker. The new worker should ensure that this information remains updated, as things may change over time.  |
| I need my current worker to introduce me to my new worker, so I am not on my own with them the first time I meet them. If they have already left suddenly or are off sick, I want to be asked about how I meet my new worker.  | We need to ensure that the current and new worker have a joint introduction visit to the child. The current worker should check where and when the child would like this to take place. Sometimes the transfer may be agreed at a meeting. However there must still be a proper joint introduction, face to face, with the child.  |
| I need to know how I can contact my new worker. | We must make sure the child has the new workers details and if they are not going to be available, who to contact – including in the evening or at weekends.  |
| I need to know if I will see my current worker again. | We need to be honest about whether the child will see or have any contact with their previous social worker again. We know it can be hard and we need to make sure we understand this and find ways to support the change.  |
| I need my teacher / mental health nurse / IRO, grandma etc. to know that I have a new worker and that they know their contact details in case I need them to call the worker for me. | The professional and where appropriate (and with consent) personal support network needs to be formally advised of the new workers details, including the date of transfer. The child needs to know that you have done this. |
| Will my siblings have the same worker? If not, why not? | If there is a different worker that is going to be involved with any siblings, we need to say why and who they are.  |

\* We are referring to child / children for all those under the age of 18.