



# Building Bridges For Children's Mental Health

## Behavioral Health Facts and Classroom Tips\*

For use with Positive Behavior Supports & Response to Intervention

# Daily Transition Support in School

## Symptoms or Behaviors

- Reluctance or fear of unstructured times including lunch, recess or after school activities
- Frequent visits to the school nurse
- Heightened distractibility
- Isolation from peers
- Increase in school tardiness or absences

## Educational Implications

In partnership with students and families:

- Establish Universal approaches to address transition needs for all students to create a safe environment.
- Identify Targeted approaches for individuals and specific transition times, such as lunch and recess, which provoke stress and unease.
- Create personalized approaches for students with intensive needs during transition times.

## About Transition

Daily transition times during the school day may go relatively unattended, despite the need and opportunities they provide for promoting healthy development and addressing barriers to learning.

Some students are so uncomfortable during transitions times when they have little support and guidance that they find "hiding" places.

Students who don't feel safe may appear uninterested and distracted. Such students are likely candidates for a cycle of events that leads to behavior, learning, and emotional problems. Research indicates that frequent tardiness and absences are early indicators of "dropouts."

Unstructured times at school are "dangerous" for vulnerable students. Recess and lunch often result in referrals to the office for behavior problems and visits to the nurse's office for calls home to parents expressing concern over inappropriate social and interpersonal behaviors.

Support from family, school, friends, and peers are important.

Social groups (including gangs) that form during lunch and recess may provoke or intimidate others. Some students may use these transition periods as a time to leave campus.

Failure to cope effectively with such challenges as transitions can have life-shaping consequences. For example, dropouts occur with too great a frequency in the transitions between middle and high school.

Support for transitions calls for well-designed transition interventions. Engaging stakeholders, inclusive of students, staff and families, in addressing the issue of transitions gives everyone a responsibility to address the concern.

Questions? Request an in-service at your school.

While it is important to respect a child's need for confidentiality, if you work with children or families, you are legally required to report suspected child abuse or neglect. According to CDE Guidelines, if you suspect possible abuse you are legally required to report your suspicions to the designated agencies immediately. This legal responsibility is not satisfied by merely reporting your suspicion to other school personnel.

Both a verbal and a written report are required. Please see a standard form for a written report in "Preventing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect", available at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/pichildabuse.htm>

This fact sheet is to be used only as a reference for your own understanding and to provide information about the different kinds of behaviors and mental health issues you may encounter in your class.

\* Behavioral Health refers to mental health and substance use disorders



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### Instructional Strategies and Classroom Accommodations

#### In the Classroom:

- ◆ Posted rules and theme-oriented artwork visually reinforce pro-social curriculum
- ◆ Open shades and use natural light to enhance visibility and reduce isolation
- ◆ Alter class-seating chart
- ◆ Encourage supportive group interactions
- ◆ Remain strength based, even during constructive criticism and redirection
- ◆ Build relationships between student "groups"
- ◆ Use classroom greeters and peer buddies
- ◆ Train volunteers in mediation
- ◆ Engage youth in meaningful goal setting

#### In the building:

- ◆ Avoid large unstructured group time together by altering schedules
- ◆ Find ways struggling students to assume "leadership" roles they usually are excluded from because of their problem behavior.
- ◆ Offer peer mentoring or student supports
- ◆ Create service-learning activities
- ◆ Use family members and others to assist in the cafeteria and on the playground
- ◆ Offer playground aids, paraprofessional and parent volunteers s training and resources to deescalate difficult situations
- ◆ Open the school library early for youth who arrive at school before the first bell
- ◆ Train as transition escorts for students with greater needs
- ◆ Assign a specific staff member to walk through transition times with students with intensive needs

#### On the bus:

- ◆ Provide training for drivers around proactive expectations and bus rules
- ◆ Use trained students as mediators or buddies on the bus
- ◆ Provide learning enrichment activities on the bus
- ◆ Address bus time as an often overlooked extended school setting.
- ◆ Tie bus behavior in to any behavior contract with student to connect home and school

#### In the community:

- ◆ Orient new students and families to school rules and expectations
- ◆ Identify interested stakeholders to assist with transition periods
- ◆ Provide ongoing training for school volunteers
- ◆ Address system fragmentation

### Resources

**Colorado Department of Education: Fast Facts,** [www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/FF-EBP\\_MH\\_ADHD.pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/FF-EBP_MH_ADHD.pdf)

**Colorado Division of Behavioral Health,** [www.cdhs.state.co.us/dmh](http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/dmh) *Resource for mental health for all citizens of Colorado*

**Empower Colorado,** <http://www.empowercolorado.com/>

**Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health ~ Colorado Chapter,** <http://www.coloradofederation.org/>

**National Network on Youth Transition for Behavioral Health,** <http://nnyt.fmhi.usf.edu/>

**Parent Education and Assistance for Kids (PEAK),** [www.peakparent.org](http://www.peakparent.org)

#### Publications:

*Transition of Youth and Young Adults with Emotional or Behavioral Difficulties: An Evidence-Supported Handbook,* Edited by Hewitt B. "Rusty" Clark, Ph.D., & Deanne K. Unruh, Ph.D.

*Transitions: Turning Risks into Opportunities for Student Support* Office of Adolescent Health, Maternal and Child Health Bureau (Title V, Social Security Act), Health Resources and Services Administration, <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

Robertson, Gwendolyn. *School-Based Peer Mediation Programs: A Natural Extension of Developmental Guidance Programs.* Gorham, ME: University of Southern Maine, 1991.