

Reducing Trip Trauma

We know that school trips can sometimes feel dysregulating for children. Here are some ways families and professionals have shared with us which can help:

LOTS of preparation

Helping the child to feel prepared and having a clear and structured plan of the trip can help alleviate anxieties about the unknown. A timetable of the trip should be provided and could start and end at home, with the rest of the trip broken down into 30minute sections – the more visual the better.

Other ways to help a child prepare could be:

- Looking at images/websites of the destination
- If possible a pre-visit with caregiver
- Chance to discuss any worries with key person in school

Mindfulness/choice time

Throughout the preparation period in class, map regular slots of time for the child to engage in an activity that helps calm them, this might be mindfulness or something sensory.

Building in this time can help maintain regulation; it can also become a pattern which can then be used on the trip to help with regulation. Mapping regular mindfulness/choice times into the trip (which should be included on the timetable and stuck to) may help to provide a feeling of familiarity and security if it is something that has been done regularly pre-trip.

Plan for success

Have fail safes in place in case the child finds it too difficult, but assume the child can and will succeed. We need to foster children's self-belief, if we don't believe in them, how can they believe in themselves?

Transitional objects

Having an item from home to take on the trip can often be powerful in helping the child to feel connected to home and remind them home still exists. This could be a small toy, a keyring to go on their bag etc.

Reduce the length of the trip

This can be particularly helpful for residential. If home and school are both concerned that the full length of the trip may be too much to manage, work out what feels like a good amount of time. If it's possible, choose time towards the end of the trip so the child can finish the trip with his/her peers and has the chance to succeed.

Contact with home

As part of the visual timetable of the trip, map in some time for the child to contact home, perhaps on lunch break or another time that this could be done discreetly. It is important the child knows they have this option available to them, sometimes knowing they can is enough to help them feel secure enough to not need to.

No pressure options

It can sometimes be helpful for the child to know from the outset of preparation and class work on the trip, that there is no pressure to go. It is important to make it clear that we believe the child can do it, but that if when it comes to the day of the trip they don't feel able to go, there is no pressure.

In each situation the preparation needed will differ, these are some ideas which can be adapted and added to in order that your child's needs are best met.

PAC-UK's Education Service offers a range of services to enable schools, parents and guardians and education and social care professionals to meet the needs of children who have experienced difficulty starts in life.

For more information please visit www.pac-uk.org/education