

MARCH, 2025

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ADOPTION EASTMIDLANDS

PEER REFLECTIONS

PREPARING FOR SCHOOL RESIDENTIALS



Peer reflections by the Complex Trauma Co-Production Group.

Spring and Summer are often the season for school residentials and they are great opportunities for our children and young people. They are often memorable experiences which they will remember for the rest of their lives, and we want to support those memories to be filled with fun and laughter, rather than fear and anxiety.

We hope our insights will help other families engage with their schools to support their children in having positive and enriching experiences.

Travel

Transitions are often really hard for our children and young people. They may have lots of anxieties about what is happening next or where they are going. The unknown is a scary place to be heading into.

The Bus

"It's really important for my son to know that he is going to be able to sit next to a friend on the school bus...this reduces his anxiety and increases his sense of belonging."

Think sensory! Does your child have access to their ear defenders on the bus when the singing starts up? Do they need to have access to snacks or a drink? Would they benefit from access to a fidget toy?

Ask teachers to make sure your child or young person has access to everything they need in their bag.



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Separation Anxiety

Providing reassurance for our children and young people, that they are coming back home is incredibly important. They have often experienced many moves in their short lives and transitions away from home can be really triggering.

“Before you child goes on their residential, start a project or a game with them at home. Leave it out where they can see it, and talk about how you will finish it when they come home. This is something very visual and real that they can hold onto and be reassured that life at home will pick up where they left off.”

“Leave a little note to find in their bag telling them that you love them or just saying hello.”

If your child or young person needs to speak with you whilst they are away, find out which teacher can support this and how and when they will get in touch with you.



So, what can we do?

A few tips from us...

- Think about things which might be comforting for your child. Do they have a special toy or blanket with home smells on, or smells that connect to you like perfume?
- Does your child have a portable night light or torch they can use in the night to help them feel safe in bed, or to help them get to the toilet at night? Ask the teacher to explain to your child or young person about where they will be at night time.



Sleep

“My child can’t shower and wash her hair on her own.”

“My child is incontinent at night.”

“I’m worried other children or young people will see this and make fun of them.”

Many of our children and young people might need additional support with things like toileting, showering, getting dressed etc. It’s really important that teachers make time to talk with you about how your child or young person can be supported in a non-shaming way.

For those who need help with hair washing, have you considered Dry Hair Shampoo? There may be alternative ways to support your child or young person’s hygiene needs if teachers can’t support them in the shower like you do.

“If my child is scared in the night, how will s/he know where and from who to get help?”

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Food

Many adopted children have specific needs around food due to developmental trauma and/or neurodevelopmental needs. It can be really challenging on a sensory level for our children to sit in a noisy dining space, with all the smells and hustle and bustle.

“My son struggles to be around other people eating.”

- Ask if the menu for the whole trip can be shared with you.
- Is your child or young person going to PGL? Here's the menu [UK PGL Menu - PGL Schools & Groups](#)
- Share information with the school staff about what food your child or young person will and can't eat.
- Explain the importance of your child or young person being able to have access to food that they feel they can eat.
- help school staff think about your child or young person and their relationship with food through an attachment and trauma lens.
- If your child or young person needs a plate with their safe foods on it, ask staff how this can be facilitated.

Top Tips

- Ask the teachers to explain what the schedule is for the whole trip.
- Find out how this will be explained to your child or young person is an effective way.
- Visual tools or aids, such as a timetable can be helpful.
- Knowing what activities are happening and when will reduce anxiety.



Communication

Predictability and routine are important for our children.

Share with your child or young person's teacher about their executive function skills and remind them:

- That they may not be able to unpack their bag without support, or pack it up again when it's time to leave.
- That they may not be able to remember what is expected of them in a new place.
- That they may not be able to adapt to the unexpected and can become dysregulated.

- Find out which teachers are going on the trip.
- Find out who your child or young person's nominated safe person will be. This should be someone they already have a good relationship with.

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Our Children and Young People's Voices

Some questions to consider from our children and young people to their teachers:

"How will I be supported to feel safe, supported and included?"

"How will I get to share my views about what I need whilst I am away and how will you tell me about what you will do?"

'Please don't ask me to be brave. I am already brave. I want to learn and grow from this experience. Your support will help me to manage challenges, emotions and situations that are difficult for me.'



Parents and Teachers

We have created a tool to accompany this information, which we hope will help support the planning and discussions for our children and young people.

The **School Residential Planning Tool** is a comprehensive resource designed to assist teachers and parents in organising and managing school residential trips.

This tool streamlines the planning process for your child or young people, by listing what reasonable adjustments can be made and who will act on this instructions, to ensure they have a great experience.

Teachers can use it to inform parents on how long the journey will be, will snacks be available and where will the child be sleeping etc. This will ensure all logistical details are covered.

The School Residential Planning Tool will help create enriching and safe experience for your children, making the planning process more efficient and stress-free for everyone involved.

School Residential Planning Tool for Teachers and Parents
This is a residential support plan for _____



Areas of need for discussion	Notes for consideration	What reasonable adjustments can be made?	Who will act on this adjustment?
Travel Children with developmental trauma needs struggle with transitions.	Who will the child be sitting next to whilst travelling? How long will the journey be? Will they have access to snacks? (access to snacks supports emotional regulation) Will they have access to a travel appropriate activity? (i.e. fiddle toy)		
Sleep	Where will the child be sleeping? Who will they be sharing a room with?		

Food Due to abuse and neglect, sensory needs, and neurodevelopmental needs, adopted children often have specific needs around food.	Will the child have access to food that they can eat? Does the child have sensory needs relating to food? What will be on the menu for the whole residential? Knowing that there will be food that the child likes will reduce anxiety and support regulation. Lack of access to food can be a trauma trigger for some children. Some children may not know where to shop eating and need support for portion control.		
Personal Hygiene Adopted children are often developmentally and emotionally 'left age' because of early neglectful experiences. This means that they won't have the same independence skills that might be expected from other children of the same age.	Can the child shower and wash themselves? How will they be supported if they can't? Is the child confident during the night? If not what non-shaming support can be put in place to support? How will the child access the toilet at night? Are they afraid of the dark? How will the child be supported to access an adult at night?		

Emotional Support Adopted children have attachment needs. Relationships are challenging for them, and they need support from trusted people to feel safe. Separation anxiety - Adopted children have experienced multiple moves in their short lifetimes and they may often lack trust in anything adults view as permanent. They may need reassurance that they will be returning home. Adoptive parents often exist in an anxious emotional space with their child due to developmental trauma. Parents need nurture too to know that their vulnerable child will be ok.	Night time comforter (soft toy etc) Ear defenders/plugs Who can the child go to with any worries during the trip? This should be someone the child has an existing positive relationship with. Little notes in bag from parent (for parents) Start a project at home to finish with your child when they return. This provides reassurance that they WILL be coming home.		
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Supporting the nervous system Does the child have any sensory needs? What sensory support can be put in place? Consider factors such as noise, light, space, clothing, equipment, activities, food, sleep. Schedule of events and communication Children with developmental trauma needs require routine and structure to support their emotional wellbeing. What else should be communicated to the child? How will the child be supported to contact their parent as needed? Consider confirming which teachers are going well to support? (link to emotional support section) Adoptive parents often exist in an anxious emotional space with their child due to developmental trauma.	List here what the child's sensory needs are how do these sensory needs look like? Consider an environmental audit of the residential accommodation. What equipment is needed? Consider a visual timetable Can the child speak with their parent on the telephone? Which staff member is the emergency contact? Will the school provide parents with updates? Parents need nurture too to know that their vulnerable child will be ok)		
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