

SPAN Crisis Support Toolkit

Practical Resources for International School Students, Families, and Staff Facing Sudden Transitions



What?

Change and Transition

Did you know that people's brains prefer to know something bad is going to happen to them, rather than to be in a state of uncertainty? When faced with uncertainty due to factors beyond our control, two different things are happening to us: change and transition. **Change** happens instantaneously. It is something that happens to us. In this situation, we have no control over what's happening. **Transition**, on the other hand, is internal. It's what happens to our hearts and minds over time, from the moment we learn about the change until the moment we have grown used to the change and all that comes with it. We may not have control over the situation, but we do have some control over how we go through this transition, who we are and how we stand in the face of it.

Saying Goodbye

Saying goodbye is hard. Even in times of sudden change brought on by a crisis, it is important to acknowledge the grief around goodbyes. In order to say a clear 'hello' to all that is ahead, don't underestimate the importance of saying a clear 'goodbye'. A crisis can affect change quickly, and we may not have the opportunity to say a clear 'goodbye' – to places, people and things – in person. Thankfully, we can use online tools to do this well. This impacts both the people having to leave (**the Leavers**), as well as those who are left behind (**the Stayers**). When we don't make space for 'good goodbyes', our grief can result into **unresolved grief**, which can manifest itself much later in life. Understanding the challenges of unresolved grief can help to redefine what a 'clear' goodbye is.

Why?

Positive transitions-care is essential at the best of times in any school environment. When schools or their communities face a sudden crisis, it becomes all the more critical to support families who face unexpected goodbyes. These situations make it difficult for traditional farewell rituals and the uncertainty adds to the stress associated with moving to a new location, returning 'home' or saying goodbye when others are moving. **Repatriation** is known to be one of the hardest transitions, and a sudden repatriation may need additional support. Therefore, a quick response guide of resources can help school staff respond positively.

We hope this SPAN toolkit supports and equips families and staff with understanding, tools and strategies, whether they are Stayers or sudden Leavers. Our goal is to proactively engage in the process of transition amidst the **short-term and longer-term challenges** of moving or being moved away from during a crisis. If you or those you care about are affected by a crisis, we hope the actions outlined here validate, educate and empower all involved to take appropriate action to improve your unique situation now and future transitions, as well.

How?

This pocket toolkit is designed for use by school staff, who are supporting students and their families experiencing sudden transitions:

- The design is to identify the person in front of you who needs support, then determine whether this is a quick intervention (short term) or you have time for more intermediate (medium term) and or long term activities.
- First, acknowledge your position in this time of sudden change — are you a Stayer or a Leaver? Understanding that transitions impact those left behind, as well as those leaving, is an important reminder to take care of yourself before attempting to help others.
- You can print pages 1-2 or keep it open on your phone, so you can quickly reference strategies to help you in the moment. The long-term suggestions are strategies you could recommend to a student or family member, to implement later, on their own.
- ['The Raft Activity'](#) can be downloaded/printed back to back for your students and families.
- ['Understanding the Transitioning Brain'](#) can be downloaded/printed and is an activity to help students understand what happens to their brain when they are experiencing change and transition.
- The links to resources on the final page are for your reference.



Leaving Students

How to help:

Short term:

- Listen and offer support during leaving process.
- Offer [breathing techniques](#).
- Help create a mindful moment: take a mental picture of what you want to take with you when you can't gather it all
- Validate the emotions they name in this time of uncertainty ([name it to tame it](#)).
- Practice [Grounding Techniques](#) through your senses.
- Encourage positive tactile sensations: Hugging stuffed animals, wrapping yourself in a cozy blanket, rubbing a special stone kept in your pocket.
- Encourage them to be active and exercise.
- Name "what is" rather than thinking about "what if".
- Consider the '[Window of Tolerance](#)' - idea that everyone has a range of intensities of emotional experiences.
- Consider the [power of hugs](#).

Medium term:

- Help students understand the 'transitioning' brain ([click here for activity](#)).
- Help students create a RAFT ([click here for activity](#)).

Long term:

- Create a Padlet for goodbye messages ([click here](#) for an easy overview on how to create a Padlet).

Leaving Families

How to help:

Short term:

- Listen and offer support during leaving process.
- Help them to breathe.
- Validate the emotions they name in this time of uncertainty ([name it to tame it](#)).
- Create an easy to follow infographic of the administrative steps for Leavers.
- Create a central drop-off point for any school supplies (devices, books, etc.).

Medium term:

- Offer to provide any necessary paperwork (reports, etc.) via email/ or directly to future school once known.
- Offer this handy '[Student At-A-Glance Template](#)'.
- Provide a central space with snacks, etc. where families can gather for support.

Long term:

- Create a page of resources for Leavers, including the infographic mentioned above, and any necessary contact information for different school departments (easy access — not tied to a parent login).
- Encourage families to stay in touch with the families that have stayed and to offer ways for their children to connect virtually.

Staying Students

How to help:

Short term:

- Emphasize importance of Staying community.
- Provide opportunities for them to care for those who are leaving.
- Recognize the feelings of the students and offer them an opportunity to express them.
- Maintain routines and rituals.

Medium term:

- Help students understand the 'transitioning' brain ([click here for activity](#)).
- Help students create a RAFT ([click here for information on RAFT and activity](#)).

Long term:

- Create a Padlet for goodbye messages ([click here](#) for an easy overview on how to create a Padlet).

Staying Families

How to help:

Short term:

- Emphasize importance of Staying community.
- Offer ways for them to get involved with helping the leaving families.
- Recognize the feelings of the parents/caregivers and offer them an opportunity to express them.
- Maintain routines and rituals.

Medium term:

- Help students understand the 'transitioning' brain ([click here for activity](#)).
- Help families create a RAFT ([click here for information on RAFT and activity](#)).

Long term:

- Encourage families to stay in touch with the families that have left and to offer ways for their children to connect virtually.

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LINKS TO RESOURCES

Safe Passage Across Networks (SPAN)

A non-profit organization which offers a home to people, schools, and organizations committed to healthy student, family and staff transition. SPAN currently offers three ways to engage: Membership, Partnership, and Training & Consulting.

You can contact SPAN at: admin@spanschools.org

Resources from SPAN Supporting Partners :

Council of International School (CIS) Blog: **Risk & crisis management in international schools: Part 1** by Mary Powell and Heather Bell, CIS School Support & Evaluation Officers

International School Counseling Association (ISCA) **Crisis and Grief Response**

SENIA International's **'Student At-A-Glance Template'** Resource

For Parents:

FREE Top 12 Tips for Moving with Children (English version) by Roots with Boots (also available in Japanese, Mandarin, and Korean)

Counseling:

International Therapist Directory 250 members, in more than 35 different countries, this resource lists therapists, counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists interested in providing culturally sensitive cross-cultural treatment and care for today's international expat community.

Linden Global Learning and Support

Provides educational and therapeutic support to international schools and students anywhere in the world.

Truman Group

Remote psychotherapy and mental health consultation to expatriates including individuals, couples, families and children.

Further Reading:

