

Just One Question Insights

This month we asked: How can youth workers best support young people through educational transitions (e.g. primary to secondary school; leaving school; entering post-16 education)?

We had: 62 responses

Key Message: Young people navigate educational transitions best when youth workers provide consistent, trusted relationships that combine emotional support, practical preparation, and opportunities for peer connection.

These should be delivered through sustained, collaborative, and inclusive programmes that recognise individual needs and life circumstances.

Youth workers provide hands-on experiences like budgeting and volunteering, help navigate options through signposting and application support, and ensure emotional and practical continuity by collaborating with schools, families, and peers to create safe, supportive environments.

Key Findings

During key educational transitions points youth workers can support young people in the following ways:

1. Offering practical support

Preparation for transitions goes beyond academic readiness. Youth workers provide hands-on experiences and opportunities to develop life skills that build independence, problem-solving abilities, and confidence.

Key elements:

- Workshops on budgeting, time management, and self-care. *"Independent living – short residencies at a university near their area offering life skill, employment workshops..."*
- Practice scenarios for upcoming changes. *"filling school bags with bricks to illustrate the weight they have to carry around."*

- Encouragement to take responsibility and try new tasks. *“Our work with young people engages them in confidence-building activities, self-expression and teamwork... through volunteering and helping out from an early age, our young people are learning and developing transferable skills, supporting them through educational transitions.”*
- Guidance to plan ahead for potential challenges. *“Maintain a good understanding of opportunities and skills required to be able to prepare the young people and signpost.”*
- Support with preparing and completing applications, forms, and deadlines.

Key message: Providing practical hands on support is crucial for empowering young people having smooth transitions.

2. By providing information and guidance

Transitions are smoother when young people have clear, accessible information and understand their options. Youth workers act as navigators, helping young people explore pathways, connect with opportunities, and make informed decisions on their next steps in education or the world of work.

Key elements:

- Offering clearer explanations of post-16 and post-18 education and training routes. *“Partner with specialised groups who help young people make that transition... have the proven pathways.”*
- Signposting to work experience, apprenticeships, and volunteering. *“Signposting to training and volunteering opportunities.”*
- Encouragement to explore new possibilities and think long-term. *“Helping them prepare for next steps and think about future opportunities.”*

3. Ensuring joined-up and consistent support systems are in place

Transitions work best when support is coordinated and relationships are consistent and facilitated by a youth worker. Youth workers link up with schools, families, and other services to ensure young people are given development opportunities and are not left without guidance during or after a change (e.g. primary to secondary school).

Key elements:

- Collaboration between schools, youth services, and local organisations to link young people to opportunities *“Partner with specialised groups who help young people make that transition as they are the experts and have the proven pathways.”*
- Handover meetings so young people do not have to repeat their story. *“Wrap around support to alleviate any stresses and anxieties... getting parents involved in the process.”*
- Regular check-ins before, during, and after transitions. *“offering peer support opportunities and ongoing check-ins after the move.”*
- Sustaining trusted adult relationships over time. *“Long-term trusted adults with a range of youth provision to support all needs”*

4. By building consistent and trusting relationships with young people

Youth practitioners, and particularly youth workers, are trusted adults who listen without judgement, offer empathy, and help young people feel valued at these crucial transition points. Youth workers meet young people where they are, physically, emotionally and socially, and create peer spaces where young people can connect, share experiences, and learn from one another, reducing feelings of isolation.

Key elements:

- One-to-one conversations to explore feelings and worries.
- Safe, non-judgemental environments where young people can be open. *“Creating safe spaces for young people to talk about their worries during transitions.”*
- Peer-led activities that build belonging and solidarity. *“includes young people who are in first year of secondary school who can give insights into how they have coped with the changeover”*
“Support the girls give each other is important... looking out for the new guides.”
- Encouragement to support one another during difficult transitions. *“Helping them at school and within the meetings... part of the program about friendships to leverage this.”*