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TRANSITIONS IN MENTAL HEALTH CARE

A GUIDE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE

AT A GLANCE

Transitions in mental health care are when you move from one mental health provider to a different provider.

Transitions may feel difficult, however your care team can help support you through this.

This resource includes questions you can ask your mental health practitioner to help you understand and feel comfortable with the transition.



WHAT ARE SERVICE TRANSITIONS IN MENTAL HEALTH CARE?

Service transitions are the purposeful, planned movement of a young person's care from their current mental health care provider or team to another care provider or team. Think of it as a process, rather than an event. Transition planning should involve your values and preferences, and should aim to create a foundation of trust and relationship-building with the new service.(1,2)



WHY DO THEY OCCUR?

There are many reasons you might experience a service transition in your mental health care, including:

- **Transitions between different parts of a service (for example, between hospital and community-based care)** – this is due to changes in how much your mental ill-health is impacting your wellbeing and what support you might need.
- **Age-related** – you might reach the upper limit of age eligibility for a service (sometimes referred to “aging-out”) and need to transition from child and adolescent to youth mental health services, or from youth to adult mental health services.
- **Changing location or educational institute** – you might have to transition if you move to a different healthcare catchment area, or if you can no longer access services attached to your educational institution or school.
- **Clinician changes** – this may happen when mental health clinicians go on leave or leave a service.
- **Young person choice** – you can make the decision to move from one clinician or service to seek care with someone else who might better meet your needs and preferences, or stage of recovery.

UNPLANNED TRANSITIONS

It is not always possible to plan for transitions. Sometimes your circumstances suddenly change, requiring a rapid change in the kind of support you need. For example, this might happen when symptoms get worse and you need to go to hospital for treatment.

Developing an Advance Statement of Preferences can help support you to write down the kind of mental health care that's important to you if you ever become unwell and can't make or communicate decisions. This can be helpful if you're under a compulsory (involuntary) treatment order. Sometimes, not all your preferences can be accommodated in every context, however having them documented can help staff to understand what your needs are, and do their best to support you.

To develop an Advance Statement of Preferences, visit Orygen's [Your Choices, Your Voice guide here](#)



WHAT MAKES TRANSITIONS DIFFICULT

Transitions involve moving from a care environment you know to a situation which may be unknown.

Young people have told us the things that can feel hard are:

- retelling their story;
- finding it tiring, difficult and in some cases traumatising;
- losing the relationship and rapport built with practitioners, making it difficult for them to be open to new practitioners;
- experiencing other life transitions at the same time (for example, leaving school or moving out of home), affecting overall capacity to engage in mental health care;
- experiencing challenges with navigating new services, systems and organisational cultures;(3,4)
- encountering system-level barriers such as increases in cost or wait times and finding a care provider that suits their preferences (for example, location, gender, etc.).(5)

“Whilst to a clinician a transition may seem like a point in time, for a young person it feels like a chasm. You step away from a person with whom you have built rapport, and you have to start all over again. It is tiring, costly, and when handled poorly leaves you feeling disengaged and despondent. It sometimes feels like you have fallen into the chasm and are not able to move across it. This isn't how it has to be.”

JEMIMA CRAWLEY, YOUNG PERSON



“When I was in the process of ‘ageing out’ of adolescent services to adult services, I found the experience really abrupt and scary, especially as sessions with mental health professionals had become such a safe and supportive space for me.”

ANONYMOUS, YOUNG PERSON

THINGS THAT YOUR SERVICE CAN DO TO SUPPORT YOU

You should always be provided support for a service transition. Things like planning, continuous care, supportive relationships and respect for your autonomy can support you to stay connected with mental health care. It is important for services to take an approach that is youth friendly and appropriate for you. Below are some things you can advocate for.(6-15)



SOME QUESTIONS YOU COULD ASK YOUR MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONER

Transitions can feel unsettling, especially when you've built trust with one team and are about to start over. You may want your family involved or you may want to start doing this on your own.

"Something that really helped when I had to transition between clinicians was having a safe space to ask questions I had about why and how it was happening."

ANONYMOUS, YOUNG PERSON

Below are some questions you can ask your mental health practitioner.



DISCUSSION AREA	QUESTION IDEAS
About the new service and providers	- Who will be my new therapist/psychiatrist, and what are they like? (For example, details, experience, etc.) - Will I get to meet them before the transition is final? - What's the cost? - Have they had experience working with other young people with similar lived/living experiences to me? (For example, CALD, LGBTQIA+.) - What's their approach to mental health care? (For example, talk therapy, medication, both.) - If we don't click, can I switch to someone else?
About continuity of care	- What information about me is being sent to the new team? - Will they know my history, triggers, and what's helped before? - Do I have to tell my whole story again? - Will my diagnosis or treatment plan change, or is it staying the same? - Is anything else about my care changing?
About medications (if you take any)	- Will my medications stay the same during the change? - Who do I contact if I have side effects or run out of medication? - If something needs to change, can we do it slowly?
Communication, support and emergencies	- Who do I contact if I'm struggling while changing services? - What happens if I have a crisis before I'm fully set up with the new service? - Is there a gap between services, and how is that handled? - Can my old provider still help me for a bit if I need it?
About involvement and independence	- How much control do I have in decisions about my care? - What choices can I make for myself now that I'm getting older? - What information will my parents/caregivers have access to? - What stays private between me and my provider?
Practical details	- How often will appointments be? - Where will sessions happen? (For example, in-person, online, hybrid.) - What should I do if I miss an appointment or need to reschedule? - Are there any new rules or expectations I should know about?
Feelings and adjustment (these are especially important)	- Is it normal to feel anxious or sad about changing services? - What can help make the transition easier emotionally? - How long does it usually take to feel comfortable with a new provider? - What should I do if I feel like I'm "starting over" or not being understood?

QUICK TIP

It's okay to write these questions down or bring them on your phone. You don't have to ask all of them and there are no "wrong" questions. Wanting to understand your care is a strength, not a problem.

If you want a record of this, you can ask your mental health practitioner to create a transition journey map together.



[Toolkit for clinicians](#)

IN A NUTSHELL

There is a lot you can do to be part of the process of transitioning to a new mental health service, and it's normal to find these changes challenging for you and your family. You can work together with your support networks to make sure your voice and preferences are heard, your autonomy is supported and there is continuity in your mental health care.

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Orygen acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands we are on and pays respect to their Elders past and present. Orygen recognises and respects their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships to their Country, which continue to be important to First Nations people living today.

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