



## LESSON TWO: LIFE AFTER THE FORCES UNDERSTANDING TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE

AGE GROUP: LOWER SECONDARY (11-14 YEARS)

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

- » Understand what “transitioning to civilian life” means for Armed Forces families.
- » Identify emotional and practical challenges young people face during this change.
- » Recognise why extra support may be needed during this period.
- » Understand what Ruby Boots is and how it supports Forces children.

### RESOURCES NEEDED

- » Interactive whiteboard
- » Video: “Sofia’s Story” – see attached PowerPoint
- » Sticky notes/ Pens
- » Large paper / flipchart

### CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE LINKS

- » **Health and Wellbeing**  
HWB 2-08a / HWB 3-08a  
HWB 2-01a / HWB 3-01a
- » **Social Studies**  
SOC 2-16a/SOC 3-16a

### LESSON BREAKDOWN (45 MINUTES)

#### Introduction

- » Starter – **What is a “transition”?** (5 minutes)

On the board write: “Transition = moving from one stage of life to another.” Ask: “What big transitions have people your age already been through?”

(Primary → Secondary, moving house, new friendships, new routines) Explain:

‘When a parent leaves the Armed Forces, it means the family stops living a military life and starts living like most other families – in regular homes, schools and communities. This big change is sometimes called the transition to civilian life.’ Link back to Lesson 1: “Last lesson we explored life in the Forces. Today we’re exploring what happens after.”

- » **Sofia’s Story**

Introduce Sofia: “Sofia is a young person who went through a big transition when her family left the Armed Forces. This meant new schools, new communities, and losing the world she had always known.” Give pupils a simple focus question:

“While you watch, listen for what changes, what she loses, and what helps her.” Use the PowerPoint to play the Sofia’s Story video from the Scottish Veterans Commissioner.

» **Quick Reflection - What changed for Sofia?** (5 minutes)

On the board draw three headings: | What Changed? | What Did She Lose? | What Helped? | Pupils suggest ideas: Moved away from military base, lost friends and community, lost sense of identity, felt isolated, later found support.

Teacher summarises: “Leaving the Forces isn’t just a job change — it can mean losing your home, friends, routines, and even how you see yourself.” Show the Tornado of Change video from the PowerPoint to help pupils understand the emotions young people feel during major change.

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» **Development**

**Carousel Activity** (20 minutes)

Set-up: Around the room place 5–6 Transition Stations (large paper or posters).

Each has one scenario based on real civilian-life transitions.

Example stations:

- **New School:** “You move to a civilian school where no one understands Forces life.”
- **Parent Under Stress:** “Your parent is struggling to adjust to civilian work and routines.”
- **Different Support:** “Your family no longer has access to the same military services and support they used to.”
- **Loss of Community:** “You no longer live near other Forces families.”
- **Taking on Responsibilities:** “You help more at home because your parent is overwhelmed.”

**At each station pupils answer:** They write on sticky notes:

- **What might this young person feel?**
- **What might they worry about?**
- **What could help?**

Groups rotate every 3–4 minutes.

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» **Whole-class discussion - Patterns** (5 minutes)

Look at the sticky notes together. Ask: “What emotions kept coming up?” (e.g. lonely, worried, stressed, confused, overwhelmed) “What kinds of support kept appearing?”

Teacher reinforces: “Transitions don’t just affect adults. Young people often feel them just as strongly — sometimes more.”

» **Ruby Boots** (5 minutes)

Explain: “Sofia didn’t just go through this transition — she shared her experiences with other young people who were going through the same thing. When Sofia and other young people talked about moving from military to civilian life, they described it as feeling like being in a tornado — everything changes at once: your home, your school, your friends, and your sense of who you are.” “They realised something was missing. Young people going through this change were often invisible — there was nowhere in school where they could meet others who truly understood what it felt like.”

## » What is Ruby Boots?

Use the PowerPoint slides to explain: “Ruby Boots is a school-based peer support project for young people from Armed Forces families in Edinburgh and Fife. It brings together pupils who are about to leave Armed Forces life with pupils who have already been through that change. The pupils who have already made the transition become peer supporters. Groups run in school and are led by a Ruby Boots Project Coordinator from Forces Children Scotland, who also trains the peer supporters.”

## » Why is it called Ruby Boots?

The name comes from The Wizard of Oz. Young people described their move from Forces life as feeling like being caught in a tornado. Dorothy’s ruby slippers help her find her way in a new world – Ruby Boots represents support, safety and belonging during big change.

## » Why it exists

Ruby Boots exists because Sofia and other young people shared how difficult this transition is and said there needed to be something that really understood their experience. By sharing their stories, they helped create a solution to support others going through the same change.

## » Plenary/ Reflection (5 minutes)

Teacher says: “Today we’ve learned about what it’s like for young people when a parent leaves the Armed Forces and their family has to start again somewhere new. We’ve heard Sofia’s story, we’ve seen how this change can feel like a tornado, and we’ve learned about Ruby Boots – a project created by young people to help others feel less alone.”

**Activity: ‘If I Were in Their Shoes...’** Give each pupil a small slip of paper. On the board write: If I were a young person going through this change... One thing that would help me feel less alone would be... Pupils write one short sentence for each statement.

When finished, ask pupils to place their paper in a box or envelope as they leave. Teacher then says: “If anything we’ve talked about today connects to your own life, or someone you know, you don’t have to deal with it on your own. You can speak to a trusted adult privately at any time.” If appropriate, read 2-3 anonymous examples, then close with: “These ideas – listening, understanding, kindness, and having people who get it – are exactly what Ruby Boots is about.” “You don’t have to be in a Forces family to help someone feel they belong. Small actions can be someone else’s Ruby Boots.”

## » Teacher Notes

For practical guidance, begin with our ‘Top Tips for Professionals’ on supporting children and young people during transition to civilian life. You can also watch our ‘In Conversation’ webinar on this topic, which introduces Armed Forces life and explains the Ruby Boots project

## » Trauma Informed Practice

Please be mindful that a child may have had experience of trauma throughout their forces life and some questions may generate difficult emotions. The impact of trauma may make it difficult for a child to put their feelings into words, understand their emotions, or remember certain details. Forces Children Scotland advocate a trauma informed approach at all times. Please refer to our [online webinar from Karen Treisman](#) where she discusses trauma in an Armed Forces context.

**WATCH DR. KAREN TREISMAN'S  
WEBINAR ON TRAUMA:**

