



Positive Parenting
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TRANSITIONS

Things change. All of life is filled with transitions. Some changes are wonderful and desired; some changes are fearful and dreaded. Some are predictable; some are a surprise. All changes necessitate transition. Some of us are temperamentally built to embrace change with zest and hope; some are built to resist change and cling to the ankles of the familiar.

Adults face transitions in work and jobs, in family configuration, in community or home, in health, and in relationships. Youth deal with transitions in schools, in friends, in romantic relationships, in future plans, in their families, and in how they view themselves and what life may hold for them. Elementary children face changes in friends, teachers, classes, homes, families, and how they feel about themselves. The transitions that preschool children face – waking from a nap, parents going to work, leaving the playground, the arrival of a new sibling – seem so small, by comparison. But transitions are challenging and children and youth need the presence, support, and guidance of adults to learn to make transitions smoothly, to handle fear and anxiety, and to become confident people, capable of dealing with change.

Our preschool grandchildren are making a transition this month, moving from their house and neighborhood to a new one. The new house is large, light, and beautiful. The yard is more spacious, with room to run and play. The neighborhood is filled with children their ages, ready to welcome new friends. But, it is a challenging transition, nonetheless.

Hayden, at age 4 ½, has announced that he's sad to leave his house. Of course, he is; it's the only home he's known. "I was born here!" he intones. His family and toys and memories are all here. Of course, he'll love his new home. First, though, he has to grieve what he is leaving. Here are some ways to help with this transition:

- Be calm and patient.
- Listen to and accept the feelings. Don't minimize them. Don't rush to cheer up the child.
- Take photos at child-eye-level of the old house and assemble an album.
- Let the child talk about what will be missed. (Don't rush to tell her the things she'll like better in the new home.)
- Have the child pack favorite toys or possessions and take them in the car.
- Reassure. You may need to do this over and over again.
- Let him know you love him.
- Expect nightmares or interrupted sleep, regression to younger behavior, toileting accidents or bedwetting, and insecurity or misbehavior.

- Predict a time that is coming soon when the fear and anxiety and sadness will be gone.
- Take it all to God in prayer.

Next month, children of all ages will be starting school - nursery school to college - and it will be another set of transitions. What can adults do to help?

- Visit the school. Walk around it and become familiar with it.
- Meet the teachers.
- Take pictures and make an album.
- Assemble supplies – book bags, school supplies, etc.
- Ask, “What will make this transition easier?” Sometimes, it is a beloved toy in the bottom of the book bag. Sometimes, it is a picture of a parent in a pocket. Sometimes, it is a note in the lunch bag.
- Assure them that, wherever they are, God is already there.

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Identify which transitions are challenging in your life. What are the strategies you use to make those transitions? Share them – both the challenges and the strategies – with someone in the midst of a particularly difficult transition.
2. With a child who has a difficult time with change, affirm that you know how hard it is and offer a few ideas to make it smoother.
3. Reassure young children that transitions become easier.
4. Reassure older youth that they have all they need to make a difficult transition. Remind them of a time they dealt well with change. Reassure them that they are not alone.
5. Pray for and with those in transition. Claim Jesus’ presence and power to still the storms of life.