



Transitions

Transitions and changes can be hard for children who have experienced trauma. Most of the behaviors that frustrate us as parents usually happen during a transition, as we are rushing out the door trying to get somewhere on time. It might even seem that our kids can't have fun because they don't respond well to good transitions, like driving to somewhere fun or heading to a fun vacation. It is hard for their nervous system to decipher between the "good" and the "bad" stress. The unpredictability of not knowing what will happen next causes them to turn on their fear brain and use their fear-based behaviors. Many times, we can see physical fear-based behaviors such as flight, fight or freeze. This may look like hiding, running away from a situation, or getting aggressive. What does this look like in your child?



Tips for Transitions

1

Give Them as Many Details as Possible

We can do this by telling them what is coming up, who will be there (or not be there), and introducing them to new people ahead of time. Some kids will have lots of questions, like “Will my best friend be in my class?” or “Will I still have the same PE Coach?”. Others will be quieter as they experience internal fear and try to process it all. You might want to drive by their school and show them a photo of their new teacher(s).

2

Announce Transitions

You can announce transitions by counting down to the first day of school. Having a visual, like a calendar where you can cross off the days, might be helpful for your child. Make a special routine where your child can cross off each day when you look at the calendar and count how many days are left until school. Make it fun! When we are having fun, we are not in fear mode.



3

Make a Plan

The older the child is, the more input they need to have on what the plan will be for the first day of school and all the other school routines, like drop off and pick up. Their voice is important, and their input should be valued. Many children have learned to turn off their voice, so this is a great opportunity to demonstrate how they can use their voice to get their needs met. Try to say “yes” to their requests as much as possible. That is sometimes a hard one for us parents!

Make a plan for where you will drop them off, where they will have to walk to for class, and where you will pick them up. If you won't be there to pick them up, make sure they know who will be there. Make a plan for any changes in their school routine due to Covid restrictions and safety procedures. If they will have to wear a mask to school, they should practice this beforehand and choose a mask that feels comfortable to them.

Most Importantly, Understand What Changes Mean for Them

In the past, your child who has been adopted or in foster care has experienced unpredictable and abrupt changes. Many times, these changes carry negative emotional charge, and their brain is constantly warning them of the dangers of change. As nurturing, safe adults in their life, we can give them new experiences to show them that change is necessary, and it can be done in a safe way.

Parents, you are doing a good job at navigating your child's world! We are cheering you on!

One of the ways that you can help alleviate the stress of a transition period is to talk early and often. We have attached a couple of sheets to help start these conversations. Print & cut out the set of Table Discussion Cards to help you start conversations surrounding the new school year. Allow them space to express any worries, fears and uncertainties. It's okay if there are no solutions to their fears, validate and reassure them that you're going to get through this together!

Is there a subject that you get excited to learn about?

What is something that is going to be different about this year? The same?

How can we help you feel prepared for the new school year?

Make a motto or mantra together.

What is an object you could keep with you to look at when you miss home?

What do you like/not like about school?

What qualities are you looking for in a friend(s) this year?

What is the first thing you want to do when you get home from school?

What are your biggest distractions during school?

What do you do to calm down when you get frustrated at school?

What do you think makes you a good student?

What are 5 words that describe you?

Back To School: Tips & Tricks



Lay it Out. Use gallon-sized ziplocks, separate drawers, or labeled hangers to lay out your child's clothes for the week. This can be a connection activity to do together every Sunday.

It Takes a Village. Take the time to meet other families in the neighborhood with children or youth in the same grade. Help your children establish connections before entering the new school year.



Rituals & Traditions. Begin these early, as a family. What is something that you are going to do or say every day at drop-off? What is something you're going to do or say every day at pick-up? For older children, try a positive text message at the same time every day!

Bell Schedule. Look on the school's website to see if they provide a class or bell schedule. Label a clock at home with arrows that show when they will be transitioning at school. Try phrases like, "You'd be going to lunch right now!" "At this time on Mondays, I'll be picking you up."



Catch the ZZZs. Getting a good night's rest is essential to your child's ability to regulate throughout the school day. Practice getting into your new bedtime routine early, even before the year begins.

Give Them Words. Returning to school this year may be especially difficult when it comes to social interactions. Give your kids the opportunity to practice common interactions that will help them with their interactions at school. This can be as simple as meeting a new friend or what to do in a peer pressure situation.



In Case of Emergencies. For children & youth, knowing what to do in case of emergencies is an important part of felt safety. Laminate an emergency contact list that your child/adolescent can keep handy. Include your address, phone number, and contact information of a trusted family friend. Make it a bookmark so they can keep handy.

Talk Early. Talk Often. Begin having conversations now with your children & youth about the changes coming this year.



Practice Runs. Practice your drive to school, drop-off, and pick-up locations as many times as needed for your child to feel confident about the family plan. Remind them about overwhelming sights and sounds they may experience.

Calming Plans. Some children and youth in care have additional behavioral needs surrounding regulation. If needed, work with their teacher(s) or counselor to schedule a 504 plan meeting.



Validate their fears and worries. As parents and caregivers, we don't always need to solve all our children's problems, they just need someone to listen! This builds connection and felt safety.

Forward Thinking. Give them something to look forward to. Make it something that is achievable no matter what behavior issues the child experienced during the week. 1:1 time with a parent or a special dinner on Friday night can be a special activity to look forward to.



Give Them Grace. Remember, transitions are difficult for everybody and we don't always get it right. Give grace and time to learn new routines.