

fostering  
**HOPE**

# Transitioning Back to School





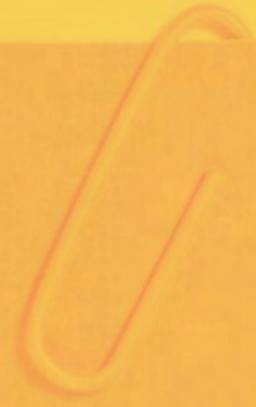
# Why are *transitions* so hard?

Transitions can be harder for children who have experienced trauma to process. If we pay attention, most of the behaviors that frustrate us as parents usually occur during some sort of transition. Whether it be life transitions like new homes or schools or, most often, in daily transitions like bedtime or coming home from school.

Sometimes it might even seem that our kids can't have fun because they don't respond well to good transitions. This can be like driving somewhere fun or heading to a family vacation. CHANGE is often a trigger and it is most evident in their behaviors. For children and youth who have experienced loss, separation, and trauma, it is hard for their nervous system to decipher between "good" and "bad" stress.

The unpredictability of not knowing what will happen next can 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?**



# Change

[chey-n-j] • noun

What feels fiercely scary  
before you try something, but  
turns out good in the end.

# Ways to Support Healthy Transitions



1.

## Give Them as Many Details as Possible

*Find ways to communicate in ways your child can understand.*

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).



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Tell them what is coming up,  
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and introduce them to new  
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# Ways to Support Healthy Transitions

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. 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.

3.

## Make a Plan

*Most Importantly, Understand What Changes Mean for Them*

In their past, your child who has experienced loss, trauma and separation, has inevitably experienced some unpredictable and abrupt changes. Many times, these changes carry negative emotional charge, and their brain is constantly warning working to protect and predict danger. 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!**

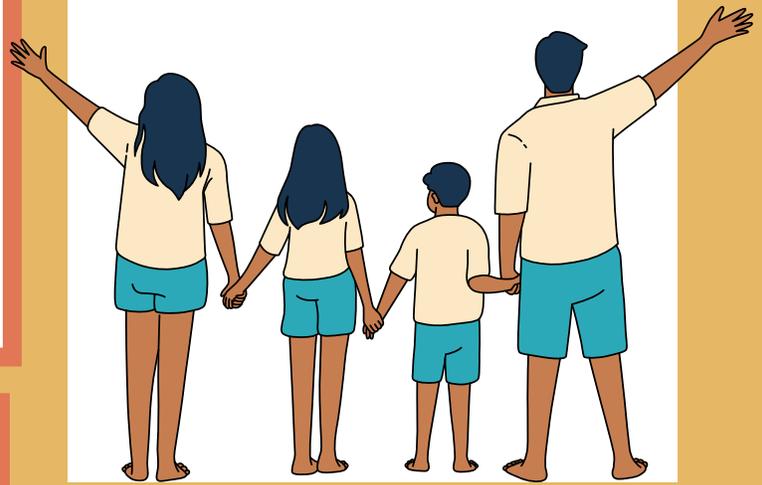


make  
a  
plan

# Family Plan for Transitions

Things I can do when you get home from school:

Things we can do together after school:



Questions you can ask about my day at school:

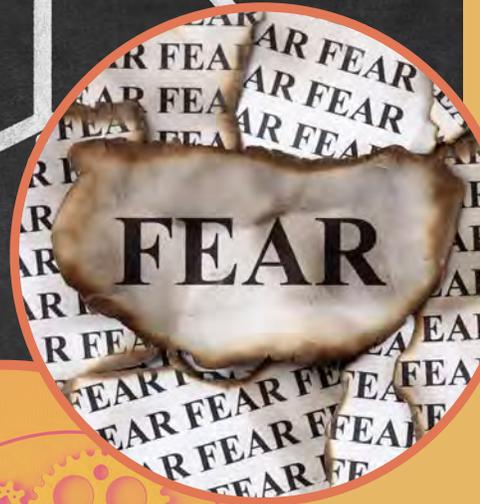
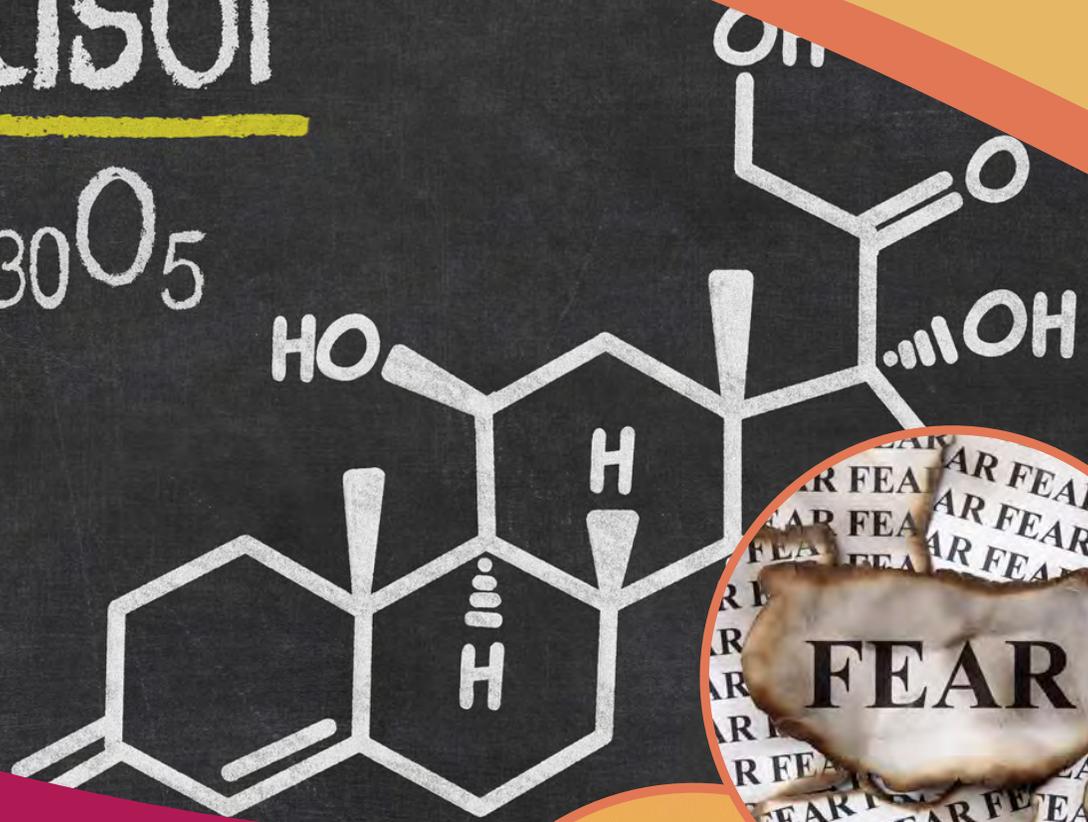
Our Family Motto:

My "red button word" is ...

Things that can help me until I'm ready to talk on "red button" day:



# Cortisol



## TRAUMA CHANGES THE WAY THE BRAIN WORKS.



You may not know it from the outside but kids with a history of trauma are afraid most of the time. This fear may look like anger, being withdrawn, lack of motivation, difficulty with focus, or organization. It can also look like being overly compliant or polite, showing extreme friendliness with strangers and what some folks might call “drama”. While these behaviors can be troublesome, they represent an unmet need.



# Reminder

Behaviors represent an unmet need. The unpredictability of not knowing what will happen next can turn on the "fear brain."



## Contact

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PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Dear Parent,

It's hard to believe school starts in just a few weeks. My kids' school used to have an event on the first day after drop-off called, "Tears and Cheers." We are happy for the routine and consistency of school but miss the easy summer schedule. For those of us whose kids have experienced trauma, we could add "worries and fears" to the event. How do we prepare our child for school? How do we prepare teachers to care for our child? Will my child be able to handle the stress of school? When will the principal call?

In this Those Who Know: Deep Dive, we will answer these and any other questions you may have. We'll share practical strategies and realistic advice for helping our kids succeed at school. Join us at our Those Who Know – Deep Dive training on August 11th at 9 am. Adoptive mom, teacher, and the Director of Programs at Fostering Hope, Dr. Beth Feger.

*Beth Feger, Ph.D.*

Beth Feger, Ph.D.





## CONNECTING IN THE CLASSROOM

*Empowering  
in the  
Classroom*



## CORRECTING IN THE CLASSROOM

If you have an educator that is interested in learning more about trauma and the effects it has in the classroom, KCPID's "TBRI® and Trauma-Informed Classrooms" is a great place to start.



**Dear Teacher,**

I am both a parent and a teacher and I want to start by thanking you for all you do for kids. I know the past few years have been challenging for teachers, students, and families. I am so grateful you are reading this letter; I hope it will help make this year a good one for you and the kids.

You are receiving it because at least one child in your classroom has experienced trauma. I am a former classroom teacher and now work with families as they parent kids whose lives haven't always been safe. They have missed out on some of the "typical" experiences kids have and had some we wish kids didn't, because of this you may see some behaviors that are unusual and perhaps even problematic or inappropriate.

Trauma changes the way the brain works. You may not know it from the outside but kids with a history of trauma are afraid most of the time. This fear may look like anger, being withdrawn, lack of motivation, or difficulty with focus or organization. It can also look like being overly compliant or polite, showing extreme friendliness with strangers, and what some folks might call "drama". While these behaviors can be troublesome, they represent an unmet need.

### **Zones of Regulation.**

You are probably familiar with or already using the Zones of Regulation curriculum. Research suggests it is especially helpful for kids with a history of trauma. They may need extra time, more reminders, and additional support to understand and use the tools. These are the tools and skills that will serve our kids so well as they learn and grow.

In moments of dysregulation or aggression remind them, yourself, and the rest of the class about your job to keep everyone safe. If possible, keep them with you in the classroom. I know it can be difficult, but it does so much to build their sense of safety. If they need additional support outside the classroom the counselor (or special education teacher if they qualify) is the ideal helper.

### **Getting more information**

If you would like to know more, I would be happy to set up a time for in-person training or consultations. The amazing parent who shared this letter with you has added some helpful information about their child on the back of this page.

With Care,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Beth Feger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Beth Feger, Ph.D.**  
**Director of Programs**

[beth@iamfosteringhope.org](mailto:beth@iamfosteringhope.org)



## A bit of helpful information about my child:

**Three amazing skills, talents, or traits of my child:**

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**\*Three strategies that work well when my child is dysregulated:**

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**Three skills my child is still learning and needs additional support to consistently demonstrate:**

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*\*Check-in on physical needs - "Hey Kiddo, I am noticing (behavior), how are you feeling? Do you need a quick break? Some water? A snack?" Meeting a physical need is a great way to build trust and help a child feel safe and will often prevent an escalation.*



# Zones of Regulation

BLUE • GREEN • YELLOW • RED

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# Zones of Regulation Activity

**GREEN**

Calm .Content. Regulated

**BLUE**

Tired. Sad. Depressed. Sick.

**Ways to Return to Green:**

- Move Your Body
- Talk to Someone Your Trust
- Draw a Picture
- Have a Snack
- Take a Break

**YELLOW**

Silly. Overwhelmed. Excited. Hyper.

**Ways to Return to Green:**

- Squeeze a Stress Ball
- Go for a Walk
- Talk to a Safe Person
- Listen to Music
- Use Breathing Strategies

**RED**

Angry. Agitated. Afraid. Mad.

**Ways to Return to Green:**

- Stop what You're Doing
- Ask for Help
- Take Deep Breaths
- Go to a Safe Place

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.



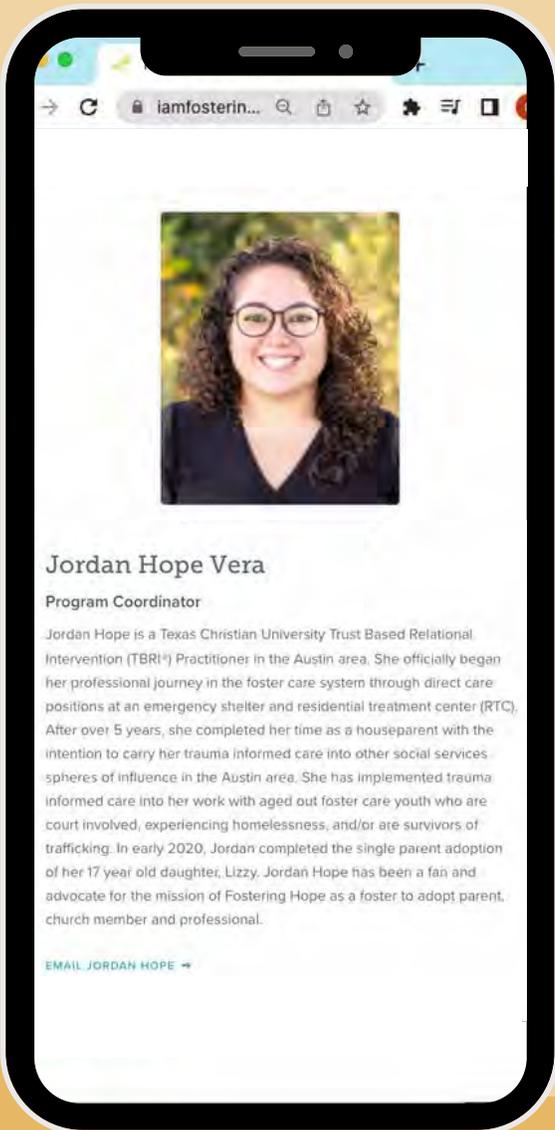
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# Those Who Know:

## Deep Dive



Tips To Set Kids  
Up For Success



Beth Smith  
Feger, Ph.D.



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