

The period from late summer into early fall is particularly ripe with large and small transitions for children and their parents to navigate. Some are significant, while many are smaller shifts that come with daily life. The almost constant swirl of change can be overwhelming for parents, and certainly for children, especially young ones. Thinking about yourself as the anchor, or 'eye in the storm' of activity, can go a long way towards helping kids feel grounded as the sand is shifting beneath them. Helping children build both emotional and executive functioning skills is essential. Key emotional skills include: recognizing and labeling feelings, building adaptability and flexible thinking, and cultivating resilience. Practical executive functioning skills include; helping children develop a sense of time (a challenge for very young children), providing information and a creating a plan, and breaking transitions or tasks into smaller and more manageable steps.

The emotional starting point for parents involves helping children develop the mindset that transitions are a natural part of life, and skills to successfully work through them can be built over time. Focusing forward with a 'glass half full' anticipation of the learning opportunities and fun that lay ahead, while acknowledging uncertainty and loss will lay an emotional foundation. The ability to make peace with the dissonance that transitions bring is fundamental to our ability to help children who are just beginning to recognize and label their feelings. Having two or more contrasting feelings at the same time is confusing enough for adults, so it's helpful to assure children that it's normal to feel worried and excited at the same time. Being present and mindful to your own emotions and validating those of your children requires listening with our ears and hearts. For some children 'less is more', especially young children who don't have a sense of time or who tend to let worries swirl around in their heads. Talking continually about impending change, too far in advance, can lead to more anxiety, rather than less. Like most of parenting you need to figure out what works for your child after some trial and error type emotional detective work.

With big transitions, like moving or starting school, sharing information about what is coming, and devising a plan with your child will help them gain a sense of control amidst the uncertainty. Visiting a new place, reading books, drawing pictures, writing stories, play acting with dolls or toy figures, and role playing can all help children work through and play out their trepidation and bring to light questions and misconceptions they may be pondering. A great way to build skills is to practice during smaller daily transitions. It's often hard for children to stop an

activity they enjoy and follow your plan, so you can validate their feelings first, then focus them forward, as in, "I know you are having fun playing and it's hard to stop, but it's time to go visit Grandma and Papa and they will be so excited to see you. Maybe you can teach them your game. In situations where children are already comfortable with routines and rules, you can help them practice being flexible, by coming up with a plan and then changing it a bit. Facing the unexpected, and learning to adapt are skills children need throughout life. Working through difficult transitions builds resilience, so it's useful to remind kids of past successes.

Giving your child a "heads-up", or 'two (or five) minute warning' so they can finish what they are doing and begin to shift to the next activity is a useful strategy. Timers can be especially helpful for preschoolers and elementary age children. Using language that denotes time and frames the coming plan also helps, as in; 'When you finish putting away your blocks, then we can play outside, or I can see you are really enjoying that game, so you have five minutes to finish up (show our child the timer) and then it's time for bed". Using language that is a clear and positive request is most helpful. We all have times when we are not at our best, but as much as possible, try to avoid barking orders that are commands. Also resist phrasing your request as a question that will allow your child the chance to say NO. If your child really needs a bath, then a friendly; "Time for your bath!" works better than; "Would you like to take a bath?"

Finally, breaking down transitions into smaller segments can make them much more manageable. The 'one- day at time' approach, or for young children, segments of the day, perhaps with a series of pictures, will provide invaluable structure. Even with a task like cleaning up toys and shifting to bed can be too much for a child who needs specific directions and support. Getting out the bins they need, pointing out which toys to pick up, and helping them get started, can go a long ways towards ensuring their participation. As children get older they can do more on their own, but the transitions and tasks get more complicated, so helping to break things into digestible bites, and teaching them how to do this, is increasingly important. In essence we all need to; "Become comfortable with the discomfort that comes with change" and build the skills to navigate each part of our journey.

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