

early years are learning years

Transition is a journey

On the first day of school children may experience multiple changes such as different classroom arrangements, new teachers, and unfamiliar routines. Other events such as the birth of a sibling or divorce also result in numerous changes children must adjust to.

Transition is a journey

Often when we think about transition we think of these major events. However, transition is much more than a one-time event. Instead, it is like a journey that takes time, preparation, and planning. Adults can help make each child's journey into new territory most successful by supporting them before, during, and after the major change occurs. Parents and teachers need to work together sharing the unique information they have about the child and what support he or she may need.

Adults can better provide guidance and support when they understand the stages associated with adapting to change. These stages and specific examples of ways to support children as they transition to new early childhood settings are described below.

Letting go stage

Feelings of sadness and resistance are common as children prepare to leave a familiar setting or situation. Children need to express how they feel. Some may act fussy or whiney. Others may lose control, cry easily, or revert to habits you thought they

had outgrown, such as thumbsucking.

Depending on the age of the child, adults can help children express themselves by reading stories about children in similar situations and talking with them about their feelings. Adults can work with preschoolers and older children to put together scrapbooks or make other mementos of who or what they want to remember.

Don't forget transitions are also a time to celebrate children's growth. Let them know how much they have grown by celebrating with other classmates, reviewing baby pictures, or pointing out new accomplishments like writing their names.

Uncertainty stage

Transition can cause fears, concerns, and mixed feelings. Often children are confused about exactly what will happen next.

All young children moving into new early childhood settings need to visit the setting ahead of time and practice new routines to anticipate what will be different. It helps to start children in the program for short periods and gradually move them into the regular schedule. Letting them bring

familiar objects from home is important, too.

Try to be clear about the things that are changing by answering any questions children have such as: *When will we eat? Where is the bathroom? How will I get home? Will I see my old friends again?*

Taking hold stage

Children in new situations need guidance about what is expected and affirmation when they are acting appropriately. Help them gain confidence by reviewing expectations and pointing out how they are learning.

Young children and their families need to feel welcome to a new setting. Children can be assigned a classroom buddy and their names can be displayed on cubbies or bulletin boards. Parents can be invited to a family night and involved on a daily basis as children are dropped off or picked up.

Remember that the more the new setting reflects children's background and previous experiences, the more successful children will be in making the transition and meeting new challenges.

This release was adapted from *Effective Transition Practices: Facilitating Continuity*, one of the series of Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Contact the Head Start Publications Center via FAX: 703-683-5769 for ordering information.