

## 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 cause numerous changes to which children must adjust.

Often when we think of 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 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 needs. 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:

### 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 whiny or fussy. Others may lose control, cry easily, or revert to habits you thought they had out grown, 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 young children are confused about exactly what will happen next. All young children moving into new early childhood settings should try to visit the setting ahead of time and practice some new routines to anticipate what will be different. Try to be clear about things that are changing by answering any questions children may have such as: Will we have snack? Where is the bathroom? How will I get home?

### 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. Seeing the same teacher's face each day helps to develop trust, which encourages the development of self-help skills and autonomy. It is essential for a bond to form between each child and his/her teachers. This does not mean you, the parent, are being replaced!! You will always be the number one person in your child's life. But, when we work together as a team, we can provide stability and continuity for each child - what better way for a child to feel secure and loved.

*(Adapted from Effective Transition Practices: Facilitating Continuity, Head Start Training Guide, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services.)*

So - o - o . . . . .

Here's some advice to parents from an 11-year kindergarten veteran teacher who has seen her share of tears the first week of school: "Prepare your child ahead of time. Visit your child's classroom and meet the teacher. On the first day, don't prolong the parting. Give a big hug, tell them they're going to have a great day, and you will return to pick them up as you discussed earlier. And "then walk away. Walk away".

Please remember that each teacher in our program has dealt with many, many children with different types of separation anxieties. We are trained to offer each child support and most importantly the extra individual attention - including hugs and soothing reassurances- that each child may need. Our teachers are here because they love working with children!