

# 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.

## Handout 1: The Process of Adapting to Change

Stages	Needs	Reactions		
		Thinking	Feeling	Acting
<b>Letting Go</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledgement of accomplishments</li> <li>• Continuing support</li> <li>• Symbol of what is being left</li> <li>• Time to express feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember the past</li> <li>• Think about what you are leaving</li> <li>• Imagine leaving people, places, and things behind</li> <li>• Plan to leave some things and take others</li> <li>• Understand what you gained from the past</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not ready for change</li> <li>• Emotional attachment to the way things have been</li> <li>• Sadness about leaving</li> <li>• Pride in accomplishments</li> <li>• Appreciate personal growth from experiences</li> <li>• Appreciate relationships that will continue to provide support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resist change</li> <li>• Behave in routine ways</li> <li>• Express feelings and thoughts about past experience</li> <li>• Celebrate accomplishments</li> <li>• Physically leave setting and end old role</li> <li>• End some relationships and continue others</li> </ul>
<b>Uncertainty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accurate information</li> <li>• Encouragement</li> <li>• Acknowledgement of skills and strengths</li> <li>• Time to express feelings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doubt ability to cope with change</li> <li>• Believe that you need others to guide and support you</li> <li>• Imagine what will be expected when the change occurs</li> <li>• Imagine many ways that you might act, feel, and relate when the change occurs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unable to adapt</li> <li>• Insecure</li> <li>• Want information</li> <li>• Confused</li> <li>• Anxious</li> <li>• Anticipation</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Out-of-place</li> <li>• Excitement</li> <li>• Hopeful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Express feelings and thoughts</li> <li>• Ask questions</li> <li>• Seek help</li> <li>• Delay or hesitate to take steps towards change</li> <li>• Test some new behaviors</li> </ul>
<b>Taking Hold</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direction</li> <li>• Feedback</li> <li>• Challenge</li> <li>• Positive results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan strategies to get help with the change</li> <li>• Clarify expectations</li> <li>• Evaluate response to behavior</li> <li>• Modify strategies</li> <li>• Believe you know how to act in new setting</li> <li>• Understand new experiences promote personal growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accepted</li> <li>• Ready for change</li> <li>• Able to adapt</li> <li>• Want to learn</li> <li>• Encouraged</li> <li>• Hopeful</li> <li>• Confident</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change behavior as directed or according to others' response</li> <li>• Gradually ask for less help</li> <li>• Take initiative</li> </ul>

## Handout 4: Addressing Change

### *Letting Go*

- Identify differences between settings for child and family.
- Plan celebrations that acknowledge accomplishments.
- Provide opportunities for sharing feelings about the transition.
- Give a symbolic remembrance to those leaving the setting.
- Invite children and families back to the setting for special events.
- Encourage children and families to maintain friendships with peers.
- Provide ongoing support to child and family.

### *Uncertainty*

- Arrange visits to meet the new caregiver in the new setting.
- Help the child know what the new setting will be like.
- Provide information to parents about the new setting, including their role in it.
- Provide information to parents on how to support their child in transition.
- Assess child's developmental ability to cope with change.
- Gradually introduce changes in current setting to prepare child for new one.
- Provide ongoing support to child.
- Develop a plan for ongoing family services.

### *Taking Hold*

- Communicate information about the child to new caregiver.
- Encourage the family to share information about the child with new caregiver.
- Transfer child and family records with parental consent.
- Arrange joint transition planning meetings.
- Create a welcoming environment for children and families.
- Incorporate familiar practices from old setting into new setting.
- Assess effectiveness of strategies in helping the child adjust to new setting.
- Revise strategies based on child's adaptation to new setting.
- Provide ongoing support to child and family.
- Exchange information about the child on an ongoing basis.

## Handout 3: Children and Change

*Note: Be sensitive to issues of confidentiality. Use this handout to interview staff. If you observe the child or family, make notes on a sheet of paper.*

**Child's Name and Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Family Change:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. In general, how has the child reacted to the change?
2. What specific changes in behavior have been observed?
3. What has the child said about his or her feelings and thoughts?
4. What strategies has the family used to help the child cope with the change?
5. What strategies has the program staff used to help the child cope with the change?
6. What strategies seem to help the child?
7. What strategies do not seem to help the child?