

Top 10 Tips for Coping with Change and Transitions

1. Allow for Feelings

It can be really hard to see our children get upset. As parents, we want our children to be happy all the time.

Instead of swooping in to rescue your child from their feelings, acknowledge their emotions and let them know it's okay to cry it out a little. Saying, "I know you're disappointed that you can't see your friends at the moment, and it's okay to be sad," lets your children know what they're feeling is normal, validated and okay.

2. Listen

When your child is upset, listen to them and let them talk it out. Make eye contact. Stop what you're doing, put down your phone, and really listen to their feelings. Talk about the highs and lows of what they're going through. Help them write out their feelings or draw a picture of what is going on. Also provide them role playing activities to provide them with the necessary and correct words to help them describe how they are feeling.

Oftentimes things escalate because children don't feel heard or acknowledged.

3. Keep a Routine

If your child is facing (or missing) a big transition—a move of year group, a change of schools, a loss—keep the rest of their lives as consistent, predictable and routine as possible. When children are coping with grownup problems (the likes of which Covid-19 is bringing about), it's easy to introduce too many other things into their lives as well, and just like anyone, they become overwhelmed and stressed.

Routine breeds consistency and safety, so keep bedtimes the same and mealtimes as 'normal' as possible. Try to give your children time to play with their usual toys, do their usual activities, read their favourite books, and do the things that bring them consistency and comfort.

4. Ensure Proper Sleep and Nutrition

When children are going through transitions, it's critical they get enough sleep to keep them rested. As we all know, naps can work wonders for children's moods and coping skills, and just like adults, plenty of sleep helps them feel more in control and able to deal with new experiences.

Be sure your children get plenty to eat and keep it nutritious and sustaining by including protein, vegetables and whole grains.

5. Build Trust

Our children trust us and with their trust comes responsibility. This means when we say it's time to go or we have set a time for an activity, they trust us to stick to it.

When you go back on things or let it slide, it not only teaches our children “a tantrum will get me what I want” but it also teaches them “They don’t really mean what they say.”

As parents, we have to keep our children’s trust and stay true to our word, even if it’s not what they want to hear.

6. Offer Autonomy and Choices

One of the best ways to help children cope with lack of control and autonomy is to give them the ability and ownership to make smaller decisions.

The little options allow children to feel they have control over some element of the decision in their lives and with that control comes peace.

7. Sing Songs, Be Silly and Stay Positive

Don’t be afraid to be positive and ‘silly’ when times are tough. After all, parents/carers set the tone of the house and you may be surprised to feel your own spirits brighten when you add a little more fun to the mix.

Often children read our moods like a book. We are their examples. So when it’s time to go, sing a “clean up” song. Make a rhyme or joke out of putting on your shoes, getting your coat, and getting to the car. Have a game lined up that makes the dreaded activity a little more exciting and fun.

8. Let Them Know When You’re Close

It’s extremely important to help children prepare for an upcoming transition. Remind them you’ll be turning off the TV in ten minutes, then five, then three. It may feel odd to you, but to someone who doesn’t feel secure with time, it gives them an opportunity to mentally prepare for the next activity.

9. Welcome Your Children to New Situations

When there’s an upcoming event causing anxiety (even the little stuff like bedtime, bath time, dinner, or a new school day), help your children feel as welcome and invited into the situation as possible.

Adding some enthusiasm and acting as though coming downstairs to dinner is a treat can change their whole mentality. Would you rather hear, “Get in here! Dinner’s ready!” or, “Come sit in this comfy chair and enjoy this yummy dinner! Look how delicious this lasagne looks and smells. You’re going to love it!” Children will be much more excited about any given situation when you invite them to join you to take part in this next “exciting” activity.

10. Don’t Make Your Anxiety Theirs

Life’s changes cause all of us stress and anxiety, especially when it’s during these challenging and uncertain times. While children need to know we’re human and that

we have emotions (and that it's okay to express sadness, frustration and hurt), we have to be careful not to project all of our emotions and anxiety on to our children in a new situation.

Be calm, grateful and reflective about our current situation. Approach it with optimism and as though it's a new adventure or experience. Even loss can become an opportunity to reflect and move into a new spot in your life emotionally. You might be extremely sad or worried, but help ease the transition for everyone involved by focusing on the positive and the many things you have to be grateful for. Reflect on happy memories and anticipate memories to come in the future, once Covid-19 and lockdown is over.