Ready, Set, Change!
Helping Your Children to Prepare and Cope

Some of the feelings/behaviors that your child might experience/exhibit when faced with change are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moodiness or irritability</th>
<th>Fear</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Social withdrawal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Regression – Clinginess, whining, tantrums, wetting the bed, playing with younger toy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
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How to Prepare

- **Talk about the change to come.** Talk about what will happen and what the change will mean for all of you. Answer as many of your child’s questions as you can, such as how long the move will take, how far your new home is from school, and what you know about the school and town.

- **When possible, involve your child in decisions about the change.** For example, if the change involves a move, let your child choose colors for his new bedroom and arrange his things when you move in. When starting a new school or a new school year, let your child choose what to wear on the first day and to pick out his school supplies. Children typically have no control over the major changes in their lives. By involving and including your child in such decisions, you help him feel more in control of the changes in his life.

- **Help your child mark the change.** If your child’s best friend is moving away, help your child mark the occasion with a card, a gift, or a special event. Keep farewells and goodbyes simple and low key.

- **Be prepared to weather the change yourself.** Know that your child will take time to adapt (some children will take longer than others). Have faith that despite the transitional difficulties, your child will come out stronger on the other side. **Make sure your child eats well, gets plenty of exercise, and gets enough sleep.** The healthier and better rested a child feels, the easier it is to withstand everyday stress and to handle change. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children get 9 to 11 hours of sleep each night.

- **Maintain family routines.** Knowing what to expect helps your child feel grounded and secure, especially during times of transition. Maintain family routines around bedtime, TV, and family meals as much as possible.
How to Cope

- *Do what you can to be available during times of transition and change.* For example, if your child has a hard time at the beginning or end of the school year, try to be more available during these times. Do what you can to simplify your family life so that you can focus on your child’s needs.

- *Acknowledge your child’s worries and fears.* Allow your child to feel angry, sad, and confused during times of change. These feelings are normal and your child needs to be allowed to express them. Acknowledge your child’s feelings and respond sympathetically. You might say, “Yes, saying goodbye to a friend is really hard. That makes me feel sad, too.” Be sure to let your child know that you take his concerns seriously. For example, you can say, “Are you worried about going to a new school? I used to worry about that when I was your age, too,” or “I know you miss your old friends from last year. It’s hard when things change.” **Let them grieve.**

- *Try to keep other changes in your child’s life to a minimum during times of transition.* For example, if you are going through a big change at home, this is not the time to send your child to a new camp or new after-school program.

- *Talk with your child’s teacher or child-care provider about changes going on in your family life.* Although teachers try to be calm and empathetic all of the time, knowing that there is a specific reason behind misbehavior helps us to be more understanding and to choose a more appropriate intervention.

- *Encourage your child to write or draw pictures of their worries.*

- *Share with your child the positive ways that you handle change.* Talk about how you feel during times of change and about what you do to cope. For example, let your child see the lists you make to help you stay organized and focused.

- *Have a positive attitude.* If you are positive about an upcoming change, your child is more likely to be will be positive too. Express your confidence that she/he can handle what is to come. Give specific examples of strengths or skills that they have that will help them to cope.