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Family Matters: Transitions in Early Childhood Education

By Chloe Learey

The start of a new school year offers a wonderful opportunity to think about transitions and adapting to change. Transitions are happening constantly, from activities within a day to weeks, months and years. Being aware and thoughtful about transitions whenever they are happening can help ease the anxiety and disruption that can occur whenever change is happening. Early childhood encompasses birth to age 8, and there are some significant transitions that happen in education during those years.

A key part of supporting and managing successful transitions is to acknowledge that it is happening, no matter how small (a child having to go inside for lunch) or how large (moving to a new town). If you understand the impact transition can have in a situation you can anticipate some of the feelings and behaviors that come along with the change, helping you to be proactive. While each situation is different you can think about what has been successful in previous transitions and develop ideas for how that might be applied to the current change. Some people like to know what is coming far in advance, while knowing too much ahead of time can make others anxious. This can especially be tricky for children and parents when they have different approaches. A parent may be more casual and laid-back, not realizing that their child needs to know the plan ahead of time in order to feel most comfortable. There is always a balance to strike, and learning in the give-and-take between different styles.

As fall approaches, some children (6 weeks to age 4) will be starting an early care and education program. Perhaps it is the first time a child will be away from their parents and around other children on a regular basis. Some aspects of this transition to consider include: Does your child need a few visits before starting a full schedule? Do you need a few visits as a parent?

It might be easy to forget that parents are also going through the transition. Considering the needs of both children and adults will help make the transition smooth. Keep in mind that you can

expect on-going change. Your child may quickly adapt to going to a new place, running off to play with friends, when suddenly one morning there are tears and clinginess at drop-off every day for a week. Sometimes we have to be detectives trying to solve what is wrong, and sometimes we have to be cheerleaders, offering support and encouragement. It is an art figuring out which tools to apply, and keeping in mind how the transition might be playing into situation can help us know how to respond.

A significant change that can happen in early childhood in our region for children with a developmental delay is the transition from early intervention (from birth to age 3) to early childhood special education (from age 3 to 5). There is formal "Transition Planning" to support this transfer of services from the early intervention provider to the school district, and an active team to work with the family to ensure it goes as smoothly as possible.

Another major transition that happens in early childhood is the move to kindergarten. It is a rite of passage in our culture, the move to "school." Even though play-based education for infants, toddlers and preschoolers is, in fact, developmentally appropriate education that creates the foundation for future success, kindergarten still signifies 'real' school, partially because it is when education becomes an entitlement for the general population. Again individual circumstances will vary widely, making the approach to the transition to kindergarten unique for every family. There are some great resources available to help prepare, including an article from the National Association for the Education of Young Children <https://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development>, and a booklet published in Vermont called "Off to Kindergarten" and available on-line <http://www.csdvt.org/ums/Welcome%20to%20Kindergarten/Off%20to%20Kindergarten%20booklet.pdf>

Remember, when a transition happens, everyone in the family is experiencing it in one way or another. Awareness of the transition, reflection about what is going on, and being thoughtful in responding can help set everyone up for success.

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http://www.reformer.com/columnists/ci_30268974/family-matters-transitions-early-childhood-education