

In Times of Change, Slow Down, Snuggle Up

HAVE YOU LOST YOUR CAR KEYS or forgotten your child's lunch? The excitement of change—such as moving to a new classroom or grade level at school—affects adults and children in unexpected ways. One mom unwittingly drove off with her iPhone on the roof of her car only to learn its fate later—another car had run over it. Her son had just started middle school.

Caught in the flow of new learning, children don't just lose things. They are more apt to wake during the night, wet their pants, or act cranky for no apparent reason. How do lost keys or lost potty training relate to the first days and weeks of school? Neither children nor adults can smoothly carry on routines that have become automatic in their lives at the same time that they are adapting to new situations. Forgetfulness or night waking at any age sends us the signal to . . . s l o w d o w n. When children are experiencing stress, they also want us to . . . snuggle up.

During the first days of preschool, many mothers and fathers found themselves doing some slowing and snuggling. Some children were “suddenly shy,” even if they had only been away from school for a week. Their parents accommodated by slowing down their routines and providing calm back-up until their children re-established their roots.

One mother said, “My inclination would be to make this good-bye much faster, but I'm honoring her feelings.” Slowing down and staying close provided the perfect cushion for those who needed it, and most children felt exuberantly at home by the end of the day.

Outside the kindergarten, some new parents clustered together as their children entered “big school” for the first time. Moms comforted each other about their lack of readiness for saying good-bye at the classroom door. The hallway outside the Office is a place where parents traditionally take time to reflect on this “rite of passage” in their own lives. “What does entering kindergarten mean in terms of my child's development? How do I feel about it?” Thinking about what change means at any grade level aids our development and helps us perceive our children's growth more accurately.

Why not slow down during these weeks of transition and allow your family to get on firm footing. For example, kindergarten teachers have often asked parents not to sign their children up for extra sports activities in the fall since kindergarten requires so much energy to make an easy adjustment. The start of the school year is a time of transformation for our whole school community, and none of us—students, parents, staff—gets used to it over night. Praise yourself for honoring times of transition. And don't worry if you lose your Blackberry or your child has “potty accidents.” It's all part of a bigger process.

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