

Finding Closure at Times of Transition

ONCE UPON A TIME, a mom overheard her little boy talking about his former teacher while falling asleep. He whispered her name over and over again. Her son had just changed classrooms, and though happy in his new setting, she knew he was missing daily contact with his beloved caregiver. Luckily, mom was tuned in to his feelings and made a point of talking about the special attributes of his old teacher, as well as exciting aspects of his new class. This true, and actually happy, story illustrates the importance of thinking about closure when a child leaves an important relationship and moves on to fresh experiences.

It's nice to think we can maintain contact with teachers, but sometimes a child moves to a new school or another state or even country, and the bulk of everyone's energy has to go into moving on. Even within the same school, children have the chance to see their previous teachers—but their day-to-day experiences won't be exactly the same.

We can help weave the strands of a child's memory by underlining the value of the relationship: "Your teacher has been so kind, and you've learned so much about nature from him."

It's sometimes surprising when a parent unexpectedly tells a teacher, "Today is my child's last day," because there is no time for closure—for honoring the bond they have had with one another. Sometimes abrupt changes are unavoidable, but if adults are aware of the interconnectedness children and teachers feel, they will find ways to reflect on the relationships and the underlying love at their core.

My fifth-grade teacher made a huge difference in my life and even now, thinking of the specific ways she encouraged me. If parents take the time to note the unique attributes of the relationship as the child is taking leave, it plants a seed for children to nurture in the future. It's normal for teachers, parents, and children often to have deep feelings about letting go of relationships as they are right now.

Here are some ideas for helping your child to take all the learning and love of his last experience with him:

Help your child write (or dictate) a note to the teacher.

Keep your feelings separate from your child's. Avoid burdening your child with your grief about leaving a particular teacher. Help your child to create or pick out a gift.

Make a time for your child to say good-bye. Pick a moment at the school party or on the last day to say good-bye and express feelings of missing.

Put up a picture of your child's teacher at home. Keeping it up for a time will allow your child to keep her image in his heart and to solidify the memories.

June 12, 2013