

**Tips for Parents** by Susie Kohl

## *Offering Support in Times of Transition*

“The times they are a-changing’.”

~ Bob Dylan

**W**HAT WILL THE NEXT THING BE LIKE? At this time of year when we are on the brink of change, children often hold this question in their minds. Often young children don't talk about their concerns but show them by waking at night, or having potty accidents. Older children may get cranky or upset about little things.

When teachers ask preschool children if they are nervous about going to kindergarten, they tell us they're worried about what the teacher will be like, what her expectations will be, and whether they will have any friends. We take walks to our kindergarten so children can gain familiarity. Older children have some of the same concerns as younger children, and if they are going to middle school, they wonder what the whole environment will be like. That's why we take them on field trips to local middle schools.

Do you remember what you needed as a child during times of transition? It helps when adults are aware that children have questions, though they may not verbalize them. Research shows that two variables help children make easy transitions. The first is having good role models for handling change calmly. “I'm starting a new job, and I have lots of questions, but I'm trying to breathe deeply and stay calm.” The second and most important variable for a child transitioning to something new is to have a parent who feels close to her and tunes in to the way she's feeling rather than dismissing her concerns as irrational.

During times of change, we have the opportunity to help a child feel that talking about his fears shows that he is handling the transition well. We might point out, “It takes a lot of courage to talk about your worries. What good questions you are asking!” We want children to develop resilience about going on to the next thing, because life is full of change.

Recently a friend told me her son, a senior in high school, kept changing his mind about which college to go to. He had written some poems about his anxieties about leaving home. Instead of urging her son to make up his mind, she told him, “You are so good at making decisions, I know you'll make the right one. Look at all the good choices you've made throughout high school.”

Parents and teachers are the keepers of a child's positive personal history, the ones who can point to the evidence of how well he has handled change in the past. “Remember last year you didn't know anyone in your class, but look how many friends you made.” We don't have to pretend change is easy in order to hold an optimistic attitude.

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