

## *Saying Good-Bye*

**A** SOON-TO-BE KINDERGARTNER offered me a piece of paper, containing lots of hand-written names, some from teachers and others attempts by preschoolers to add their “signatures.” “Could you put your name?” he asked with a sense of satisfaction. His teacher and I agreed that, without knowing it, he was creating his own yearbook, a one-page collection of people he would miss when he leaves for public school.

It’s important for children to have a way of saying good-bye that makes sense to them. Without good-byes, it’s hard to recognize that leave taking can be confusing—a favorite babysitter who suddenly becomes unavailable, an adult friend who moves on with his life, a teacher who gets sick and has to take leave. We want to talk with children, reassuring young ones, who are still egocentric in their thinking, that they haven’t caused the caregiver or the teacher to leave, and that most people have emotions about saying good-bye to situations and people they love.

The time between when a change occurs and when people adjust to the new circumstance is the period of transition. We can better support a child when we recognize that every transition brings some loss, even when there is apparent excitement. Recently teachers in a preschool room brainstormed about a teacher who is leaving and ways they could help a child who is very close to her receive the support he needs. Children going through change may become frustrated more easily, wake up at night, or slide into old patterns of behavior. One of the most important aspects of helping a child handle change is consulting with her about her feelings and the ways she wants to express herself and make positive memories before moving on.

**Tune in to your child’s feelings.** Has your child been pushing limits during the day or waking up at night? Think about ways to support him through change. Create a scrapbook together. Have your child draw pictures. Make cookies or some special treat his teacher will enjoy. Let your child use a camera to photograph the places and people he wants to remember.

**Talk about the way you handle transitions.** “I’m going to make your teacher a nice card because I won’t be seeing her as much, and I will miss her.” Stay aware of your own feelings of loss and excitement.

**Offer simple explanations.** “Your teacher had to leave because he was moving to a new city.”

**Keep routines in place.** Maintain the security of predictable pickups, mealtimes, and bedtimes. Avoid adding lots of new activities during a transition, like signing your child up for soccer while he’s getting used to the new learning of kindergarten.

**Create previews of the new situation.** Walk by your child’s new classroom, come on the weekend to play in the new yard, talk about the activities she will enjoy.

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