

TALKING IS TEACHING | COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Transitions and Fostering Adaptability... “You don’t fear change, you fear the unknown”

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Over the last few months, we’ve explored several important topics together, and this month, we’ll take a moment to reflect and consider how many of the things we’ve already learned fit together to help us build strong brains and healthy relationships with our children. Our topic this month is “Managing Transitions and Fostering Adaptability,” and we’ll explore how helping our youngest ones maneuver change will serve them well as they grow older!

*Raise your hand if your child has trouble finishing one fun activity and starting a new task or if leaving a playground to head home for the day brings tears and tantrums. Now... consider for a moment if tomorrow at work you were given a different job description.... or if you were on a plane to the beach only to be told you are now headed to the desert?! Although feelings of sadness, anxiety and frustration your child experiences when a fun activity ends is an almost universal part of childhood, it’s also an incredibly important **opportunity to learn adaptability**, which has been linked to success and longevity! As adults, we have many ways to help our little ones develop skills that will help them master this task, and we may become more adaptable in the process!*

There are lots of reasons that children have difficulty ending one task and starting another, and sometimes just understanding the “**why**” can help us as adults anticipate and help them through it. It makes sense to all of us that we’d rather do something fun, than stop and do something that’s not as fun, but sometimes, it’s not quite that simple. For some children, they may have learned that if they protest a change, they will successfully change an adult’s mind....we must remember they are learning constantly from us to utilize tactics that have worked for them before! **Be consistent!**

In addition, as we’ve mentioned before, children are creatures of habit, and as such, they’ll continue doing what may bring comfort or predictability to them. If they are asked to leave one familiar place (like home) to go to a new, less predictable place, that can bring fear and anxiety. Anyone who has been around children for long also knows that when children are tired or hungry, they are more likely to resist EVERYTHING...and especially transitions! Often, just the tough work of starting something new once you’re already comfortable with a present task is a deterrent to change.

Sometimes children have special circumstances, like trouble processing as quickly as other children do or perhaps they tend to become overly focused on one activity, and these things make it even more difficult for them to smoothly move from one task to another. Often we as adults may forget certain environments with loud noises or many people, like grocery

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stores and malls, can be overly stimulating and create confusion for them. *Has anyone seen a child experience this?*

Does anyone know of some tactics we've already discussed together or practices that you use to make transitions easier for our children? (allow those present to share some ideas....singing to signal a transition, talking about the steps of what we will be doing and what will come next, maintaining a relatively routine schedule, remaining calm and being consistent, making sure our children get plenty of rest, eat healthy foods, etc).

There are even certain rhythms in our lives that change and bring some difficulty at first. Don't underestimate things such as daylight savings time, weather changes and new routines such as waking earlier for mom's job or starting a new school schedule.

Our world is full of change, so here are some things you can start doing from birth with your little one to help them build the capacity to adapt and transition as situations change. Not only do these ideas and principles work for very concrete changes, such as leaving home to go to the store, but also they lay the foundation to help our children adapt to big changes, such as moves, new schools, death of a loved one or new siblings. When we consider using the same principles in all situations, we are setting our children up for success and the ability to handle whatever comes their way!

Techniques:

1. **Give your child an idea of how long they will do something, and periodically remind them of how much time is left.** When there are only two minutes remaining, use the same phrase each time, and say something like, "2 minute warning, let's get ready to clean up." It may seem silly to start this practice while your child is small, but remember that they are already listening to you and understanding many things you say before they are able to say the words themselves. (For some children, it may even be helpful to have a visual timer, such as a kitchen timer they can see for themselves).
2. **Use a consistent routine**...especially for the transitions that are harder in your family. If you know bedtime is a really tough transition time, develop a routine that is the same every night. Over time, your child will start to find comfort in this routine and the transition will become smoother.
3. **Remain patient and calm, even in the face of a child's meltdown.** Remember, they are always learning from you, so when you maintain your calm demeanor, it teaches them to do the same. When they sense your frustration, it only heightens their own emotions.
4. **Make sure your child is getting plenty of rest and eating healthy snacks and meals.** Often when children are tired and hungry, transitions become tougher for

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them! Anticipate the tough times of day, such as right after picking them up from daycare or after playing with a friend, and try to be prepared with a healthy snack or a favorite soothing item.

5. **As you go about your day, prepare your child for what will happen next.** Narrate your day and use words such as “next, after or first, second.” The more we surround our children with language, the more they will not only understand what is happening around them, but they will build a bigger vocabulary for themselves, which allows them to communicate better.
6. **Allow them to use a transition item.** Allowing your child to carry a toy truck with them when they leave your home or a small stuffed animal when they go into the grocery store can often be all they need to feel confident and ready to face a new adventure. You can even think of a fun way to have your child “put the stuffed animal to sleep” in your car or “park the toy truck” in your bag when entering the store.
7. **Consider ways to distract your child as you are transitioning.** We often talk about and demonstrate singing as it’s time to clean up or travel from one spot to another, but carrying crayons and paper in your bag or having a bottle of bubbles from the dollar store can often bring calm when you run into an unexpected wait somewhere or you need to end an activity.
8. **Practice new experiences with your toddler and preschooler before they happen.** You can read a book about going to the doctor or even role-play walking into a new classroom or being at school together. This can build confidence and relieve anxiety when your child is facing a new situation.

Remember we are building strong brains with everyday moments! It’s the consistency of these daily activities or small habits that over time prepare our little ones for school and beyond! You are their best teacher!