



Young Children and Transition

A common concern of the fall season is the adjustment that accompanies the beginning of school. Fall brings new classrooms, new teachers, seasonal activities such as Halloween and Thanksgiving, and a busier pace in general. It is not uncommon for child care providers, parents and the young children in their care to experience this as stressful. By working together to establish new relationships, the child care provider, the parent and the child can make a successful transition to the new year.

Some children are more sensitive to changes than others

The changes demanded by the normal adjustments of the fall place some children at more risk of injury, illness or increased anxiety. The majority of children are very resilient and able to handle the increased pace and changes without signs of irritability or difficulty. But research shows that 15 to 20 percent of children have special vulnerabilities to even the normal changes of life and may experience commonplace adjustments as stressful. These children tend to be those with a "slow-to-warm-up" temperament or who are excessively shy. They are equally represented in boys and girls, and in all socio-economic groups.

Because they are not necessarily active children they may not call attention to themselves. In order to make a successful transition, they may need more time to adjust to the new teacher, children and classroom, and extra physical comfort. This can be accomplished a variety of ways. Some children may need a parent to linger longer at drop off, or to bring a transitional object from home to class. In other cases it may be helpful for a parent to share with a teacher the special needs of his or her child for a given day in order to facilitate separation and adjustment.

You can help all the children in your care adjust to change

Routines and a sense of safety established in the center are also important comforts to all children and parents in letting go and moving forward emotionally with the day. Young children are helped by as much predictability as possible. They are also helped by an unhurried pace; less is often more in the life of a young child. This can be particularly challenging to achieve during this busy season with many competing opportunities and demands.

Taking time to prepare children for upcoming events by talking or reading books about the events both at home and at the center can also be helpful. Good nutrition, adequate sleep and exercise will also add to a solid foundation for coping with the pace of life. Thinking through a day, and organizing it with the goal of fewer outside activities, errands and distractions, allows for both parents and child care providers to attend to and focus as much as possible on the needs of the children in their midst. Such time and attention will also help build supportive relationships in which all the children are successful in negotiating the business of the fall.

References

Aronson, S. (July 2001) *Caregiver Mental Health*, Exchange Press.

Children, Families, and Stress, Report of the 25th Ross Roundtable on Critical Approaches to Common Pediatric Problems, 1995.