

Support for Guiding Youth through Change and Transition

Change is the process we all go through as we move from one circumstance to another. Each change – even positive change – leaves something behind creates loss, every loss has a time of transition though on the other side of loss new opportunities are offered. Change often results in stress – whether perceived as positive or negative – change is uncomfortable. To support our tolerance to change we learn to create balance in other areas around us to cope. Learning to “cope ahead” and recognize that transition has impacts on us makes it important to monitor other stressors in our lives to encourage balance and healthy coping.

Adolescence in itself is change and transition ... perhaps most challenging are the emotional transitions. These include self consciousness – social focus – anxiety regarding new experiences – loneliness as relationships become more complex – disappointments – and frustration as youth strive for independence.

It is important to remember that “while change can make your circumstances different (or your story change) you essentially remain the same person.” Focusing on the elements that remain the same in the midst of change can be supportive – for instance – the quality of education, the level of supports, the potential for success, personal beliefs, character, peer group and the goals and outcomes may be elements that are fixed in the transition and change process.

Here are some points to help support a youth through change:

- At school, all youth experience change—new teachers, different classes, new timetables. Some will also experience changes in friendships. Sometimes these changes can affect their learning, but they don't have to.
- Encourage your child to see change as an opportunity—the chance to gain new skills, to grow, to learn something new, to think and move outside their norm.
- Help them to put things in perspective. Encourage your child to take a step back, give themselves time, and think about when they've dealt with a similar change in the past.
- Fear of the unknown can make change more difficult, so help your child learn more about what's happening.
- Keep up a regular routine. Having a predictable routine at home can help youth to feel safe and secure and can provide stability in a time of change.
- Encourage your child to talk to someone about how they are feeling. Sometimes the best person to talk to will be you, but other times it will be a friend, a teacher, another relative or a mentor. If they are finding it hard to cope with change, talk to someone like a school counsellor, doctor, or support service.

- Give your child the chance to get away from it all, mentally or physically. Even a short break doing something completely different can help to create a new perspective. Encourage them to take a walk in the park, watch a movie, or go out with you.
- Make sure your child gets enough sleep, nourishment and exercise. Healthy minds and bodies are better equipped to cope when something out-of-the-ordinary occurs.

With these strategies and your support, your child may be better equipped to cope with most changes without an impact on their learning.

Change is not always comfortable – as a process it requires decision making and processing with knowns and unknowns.

Supporting youth to find a means to adapt and cope – to see opportunities in change helps them build skills and grow through change. Balancing advocacy for changes you may not agree with and supporting a sense of stability and confidence in youth can be challenging. Youth are processing at their own developmental stage, while we as adults have our own styles and skills.

Being mindful of their fears, ability to communicate and priorities at their age and stage is important to consider when communicating your own opinions. Youth have a unique perspective – allowing them to communicate their concerns and emotions can bring clarity to your discussions about the changes you are facing.

One of the goals of emotional growth in youth is resilience. This serves to help us cope with challenges and changes in life. All through adolescence there are transitions taking place as youth pass from childhood to teen years – from reliance to responsibilities ... as they leave one stage behind they face the challenges and opportunities of the next.

Resilience involves a number of important traits.

Competence

Competence is the ability to handle situations effectively and is acquired through actual experience.

Children can't become competent without first developing a set of skills that allows them to trust their judgments, make responsible choices, and face difficult situations.

In thinking about your child's competence, ask yourself:

- *Do I help my child focus on their strengths and build on them?*
- *Do I help them recognize what they have going for them?*
- *Am I helping them build the educational, social, and coping skills necessary to make them competent in the real world?*

Character

Children need a fundamental sense of right and wrong to ensure they are prepared to make wise choices, contribute to the world, and become stable adults.

Children with character enjoy a strong sense of self-worth and confidence. They are more comfortable sticking to their own values and demonstrating a caring attitude toward others.

Some basic questions to ask yourself include:

- *Do I help my child understand how his behaviors affect other people in good and bad ways?*
- *Am I helping my child recognize himself as a caring person?*
- *Do I allow him to clarify his own values?*
- *Do I express how I think of others' needs when I make decisions or take actions?*

Coping

Children who learn to cope effectively with stress are better prepared to overcome life's challenges. The best protection against unsafe, worrisome behaviors may be a wide repertoire of positive, adaptive coping strategies.

Before we begin teaching children this repertoire of coping and stress-reduction skills, here are some basic questions to ask ourselves:

- *Do I help them understand the difference between a real crisis and something that just feels like an emergency?*
- *Do I model positive coping strategies on a consistent basis?*
- *Do I guide my child to develop positive coping strategies?*
- *Do I create a family environment in which talking, listening, and sharing is safe, comfortable, and productive?*

Control

When children realize that they can control the outcomes of their decisions and actions, they're more likely to know that they have the ability to do what it takes to remain stable.

A resilient child knows that they have internal control. By their choices and actions, they determine the results.

Some questions about control:

- *Do I help them think about the future, but take it one step at a time?*
- *Do I help them understand that no one can control all circumstances, but everyone can shift the odds by choosing positive perspectives and behaviors?*

Communication that openly talks out emotions, finds words for how we feel and recognizes emotions are important skills to develop. Emotions are a source of self understanding – communication about our emotions is a means of learning emotional regulation and personal growth. Allowing open discussions about emotion is helpful in informing adults about the impact the experiences are having on the youth. Processing the experience will bring up emotion, and identifying the emotions involved can help choose a way to respond.

Strive for balance and stability while advocating for your children’s interests and supporting them in coping and succeeding through transition.

If you find your children are struggling to cope and you feel that additional support would help your family I encourage you to seek supports at school – there are Student Supports in each school that support social emotional needs of students. In addition, there are community supports available to address these issues with your family. I encourage you to reach out for support and discussion if you have these concerns.

Learning skills to cope well while in the midst of transitions can enhance the emotional resilience and growth we are all aiming for.

References and Resources:

<https://au.reachout.com/articles/7-tips-for-dealing-with-change>

http://www.fosteringresilience.com/7cs_parents.php

https://www.cpa.ca/docs/File/Emergencies/helping_teens_cope_EN.pdf

<https://www.psycom.net/hidden-signs-teen-anxiety/>