

Ways to Help Your Children Cope With Change

Unlike adults, children lack control over many aspects of their lives. That's why they feel more comfortable with routines and familiar faces. Children can feel confused, afraid and even hostile when they find themselves in the midst of a change brought about by a family move, the addition of a new family member or other transitions.

The good news is that children are adaptable to change, especially when they're prepared well in advance. Once a child learns that a change is about to occur, he or she will begin to make emotional adjustments to accommodate the new situation. When a child begins to accept the change, the entire family will be better equipped to make a smoother transition.

Parents can use diplomacy and negotiation skills to introduce minor changes into a schedule. For example, if you're unable to go to the library on your regularly scheduled day, try to give your child an alternative, so expectations are still met. Perhaps your sitter could go with your child to the library instead. Your child may even welcome this new adventure.

For more substantial changes, try to give a child as much advance notice as possible. Introduce changes gradually. For example, if your child will be going to a new child care provider, take her to the site for a preliminary visit. Let her bring a favorite stuffed animal or prized blanket. This will give her something tangible to identify with and will help take the uncertainty and fear out of the new situation.

Children need more preparation to get used to major changes, such as the addition of a new sibling. Expect some rough spots in times of major transition.

- Allow plenty of time to discuss how your child's life will be different with a younger brother or sister.
- Encourage your child to ask questions and express fears.
- Look for children's books that deal with major life changes for kids. Use the situations and characters in the book to help your children talk about their own feelings.

When big changes occur in your child's life, try to keep some routines the same. Consistent morning, dinner and bedtime rituals can comfort children when major changes are afoot.