



Empowering kids to manage change and transition

<https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/families/enewsletter/empowering-kids-manage-change-and-transition>

Change is an inevitable part of life and children's early experience of change provides the opportunity for adults to model and teach adaptive coping skills. Often children aren't the ones making the decision to change something in their lives. Rather, change happens to children, as the result of unavoidable life events (like transitioning to school) or decisions their parents make (like moving house). This can sometimes bring up feelings within the child of anger at the people making the decision to change, or perhaps feelings of fear around what lies ahead. Feelings of confusion are also common in children when faced with transition and change, so providing children with a sense of structure, routine and consistency (as far as possible) will help support them with managing change.

Change is often overwhelming for children, especially if the decision for change was not theirs. Parents can help children manage these intense feelings by creating a safe environment for them, and reducing the level of uncertainty around the change. Maintaining structure and regular routines helps with this, so children understand that not everything is changing, and that most important things in their world can still be relied on. This will help children to view change more optimistically and be more open to embracing the change.

One way to help children cope with these feelings is to give them the opportunity to be actively involved in the change process. For example, if the family is moving house, the child can be given the opportunity to decorate their new room. This might result in them feeling like they can control a small part of the change, and one that is important to them. This active role and engagement in the change process provides the child with opportunities to feel empowered and in control of the situation, thus assisting them with better managing and adjusting to the change.

Another way to involve children in a house move might be to give them jobs on the day of moving - bring the movers glasses of water, or look after the family pet, or check off boxes on a list.

Talking through the change in detail can also help children to feel involved. Open dialogue with children about upcoming change, what's to be expected and how this will impact them is important in assisting children to feel involved. Communicating what is going to happen and when removes some of the fear and worry about the unknown, and can give children the opportunity to be more engaged and feel a sense of empowerment and control in the change. This can also help children to feel safe and loved, and able to express the intense emotions they may be feeling at a point of transition.

Change is often accompanied with feelings of grief and loss, which can be upsetting for children. Depending on age, children will experience grief in different ways. Young children may lack the language to express this grief, so parents and carers play an important role in supporting their child with healthy emotional expression and regulation. Noticing changes in a child's behaviour and taking time to check-in are important. For young children supportive adults can label the child's emotions (eg "you are looking down, are you feeling sad?") and offer suggestions for strategies to manage. This not

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only assists children with building a dialogue for their experience but also allows opportunities for healthy expression of emotions.

Supporting children to feel empowered to manage change and have a sense of optimism about the future provides opportunities for developing resilience. Building resilience comes through the development of social and emotional skills, including coping skills. In order for children to build resilience they need to be exposed to life's inevitable ups and downs in the context of supportive adults, to allow children to learn practical skills for managing change. Resilience, developed through exposure to many little challenges, can be drawn on when larger challenges arise, like change and transition, and help a child feel more in control.

Further reading:

- [Everyone feels overwhelmed at times](#)
- [Resilience](#)
- [Managing stress](#)

