3. Helping Your Child Through Difficult Transitions

At a Glance...

Children experience many transitions as they grow. Some transitions are more difficult to deal with than others because they are unexpected or out of the child’s control. Parents can help their children to cope successfully with these transitions.

Time

Approximately 1 hour

Core Concepts

- The time between when a change occurs and when people adjust to the change is a period of transition.
- With all transitions, there are losses.
- Dealing with the losses that come through change can help children to deal with the new things that they face.
- Some transitions are very difficult because they are not expected or they are not under the child’s control.

Objectives

- Participants will think about transitions their children have gone through recently or may experience soon and identify potential losses.
- Participants will identify at least one way they will try to help their children deal with the losses they have experienced or will experience as a result of those transitions.

Materials

- Flip chart or chalk board
- Markers or chalk
- Index cards and pens or pencils
- "Losses in Difficult Transitions" handout (F-3-a)
- "Web Sites for Parents: Coping With Transitions" handout (F-3-b)
- Helping Your Child Deal With School Transitions handouts from Kid Smart 2:
  - "Transitions Worksheet (B-6-a)
  - "Transitions Strategies for Children" (B-6-b)
  - "The Seven Stages of Transitions" (B-6-c)
- Making the Transition from Dependence to Self-Sufficiency transparency from Lesson 1:
  - "What is Transition?"(F-1-b)
“Who Wants to Win a Lot of Money?”

**Purpose:** The purpose of this activity is to help participants recognize that even with positive changes or transitions, there are losses that will be experienced that need to be dealt with.

**Materials:** Index cards and pens or pencils for each participant

**Instructions:**
This activity can be conducted with any number of players including just one person. Give each participant an index card and a pencil or pen. Tell each person that they just won one million dollars playing “Who Wants to Win a Lot of Money?” Ask them to think about how their lives would change if this really happened. On one side of the card, have them list some of the changes they might experience. Now, ask them to think about things they might lose or have to give up if those changes occurred. Have them list losses on the other side of the card. Ask each class member to share one change and one thing they might lose or have to give up as a result.

**Example:**
Participants might decide to buy their own home in a nice neighborhood. If they did so they might:
- lose their current house or apartment and their current friends and neighbors;
- have children move to a different school losing their current friends and teachers and school activities, etc.;
- change churches and recreational activities;
- lose privacy because they became famous from being on television and winning all that money;
- lose their sense of identity as middle-class or working class citizens;
- lose their confidence in interacting with their peers because they would now be in a different peer group.
Facilitator's Script

As you discuss transitions children may experience, list the types of changes on a flip chart – developmental, chosen, unexpected -- and list examples class participants generate on the chart under each of the types listed. Use the examples in the script if participants have trouble coming up with examples.

Define transitions. Show the handout/transparency “What is Transition?” (F-1-a). Review the model of a transition.

When we experience change, there is a time when life as we knew it ends. Then we go through a period called transition where we aren’t sure what we are going to do. We explore options. We may long for the way things used to be. We feel insecure and maybe frightened. We may not be able to think about the future. However, if we make it successfully through the transition, we begin to see how things might be in the future. This is the time of beginning when we think about what might work and begin to think of some positive things related to the change. When the transition is complete, we come to accept how things are now. We begin to see this new way of being as normal.

Distribute the handout “The Seven Stages of Transitions” (B-6-c). Go over the stages of transitions.

Think about transitions you have experienced. Can you think of examples of those different stages based upon your own experiences? Can you think of family members or friends who went through transitions and the stages they went through in the process? Children will have many of the same feelings and emotions as they deal with transitions.

Children experience lots of changes as they grow. Some of the changes are related to their growth. We call those developmental changes. These changes are expected to happen.

Have class participants name some things that would be considered developmental changes. (Examples: starting to school or a girl beginning to have her period).

Because we expect these changes, we can be prepared to help children through the resulting transitions by learning what to expect and by planning ahead. Other changes may be the result of choices children make.
Have class participants name some changes that occur as the result of choices children make (Examples: deciding to take a certain class or choosing whether to play a sport or to join a club).

These choices may be hard, but children feel some control of the situation because they were able to make choices.

Sometimes changes are more difficult because they are not expected or because the child has no control over the events. The resulting time of transition may be very difficult because the child feels helpless concerning the change.

Have class participants name some changes that for children that would be unexpected (Examples: the illness or death of a parent or other close family member, parents’ divorce, having to move because a parent has lost or gotten a job, or an injury or illness that results in a disability or change in the child’s normal course of growth or development).

Discuss the types of loss that go with most changes. Give the handout “Transitions Worksheet” (B-6-a) to each participant and review the types of losses people face when going through transitions. Have participants give some examples in each area for some difficult transitions children might face. Examples are in parentheses for your benefit if participants have difficulty naming some of those losses.

When going through transitions we may experience several types of loss. Look at the “Transitions Worksheet” as we talk about losses we may experience. Write some examples of each type of loss on your worksheet.

- **Material loss** - loss of a physical object or change in familiar surroundings (example would be the loss of the house the child has grown up in when the family has to move or the loss of all their toys in a house fire).
- **Relationship loss** - loss of or change in relationships with others (example would be loss of parents as a unit when parents divorce or the loss of friends when the family has to move).
- **Loss of self-image** - loss of an emotionally important part of oneself or loss of hopes or dreams (example would be the loss of the ability to walk as a result of an automobile accident or the loss of the dream that their biological parents would get back together when one of them remarries after a divorce).
- **Role loss** - loss of a specific social role or place in a group (example would be the loss of status in school or with friends when the child moves to a new community or the change in position in the family with the birth of a new brother or sister or the addition of step brothers or sisters).
• **Loss of familiar system** - loss of familiar rules, people, positions or ways of doing things within a system (example would be having to change churches or schools because of a move or the change in routine at home because of parents’ divorce or because a parent is ill or disabled).

Have class participants pair off. (If your class is small or has only one member, do the following activity together as one group.) Have each pair to identify an unexpected or difficult change that their children have faced or might face in the future. Using the “Transitions Worksheet” (Handout B-6-a), have participants to identify possible losses a child might face in that type of transition. Have each pair report to the class members on the losses they have identified. After each group or individual has reported, give each participant the handout “Losses in Difficult Transitions” (F-3-a). Add any other losses they may have identified that are not listed on the handout.

After losses have been identified, have participants get back in their groups and to name some ways parents or other adults could help children cope with the transition they were discussing. Have them think about the resources identified in the lesson “Resources for Transitions.” Distribute the handout “Transitions Strategies for Children” (B-6-b). Allow them to use that handout and the handout on “Seven Stages of Transitions”(B-6-c) to come up with some suggestions. Have groups report back to the large group. Allow others to make suggestions if they have ideas. Get participants to write the suggestions on their handouts so they can use them in the future.
Homework:
As a homework assignment, have class members select a difficult transition their child or children have experienced or that they may experience in the future. An alternative would be to have the participants think about the transition their children will experience when the parent goes to work and begins earning an income. Remember that even positive transitions involve some losses and adjustments. Have participants do some research at the library or on the internet to find suggestions for ways parents can help their children adjust to these transitions. Distribute the handout “Web Sites for Parents: Coping With Transitions” (F-3-b). This can be used by you or by participants to locate web sites that have information about dealing with transitions.

Material for this lesson was taken from: