



REPORT_{to} PARENTS

RP 31:6

Dealing with Change

Change is a part of life for everyone, and it's important for children and families to learn how to cope with it. Whether it is moving to a new home, school or community, a divorce or death in the family, a hospitalization or illness, or even just a friend moving away, the stress of a sudden change can be overwhelming for a child. However, there are many things families can do to help.

Listen. Sometimes children just need to talk about what's troubling them. You don't have to know all of the answers; what's important is that you let them express themselves and you show that you are there for them.

Let outsiders in. There are times, such as during a divorce, when children might feel more comfortable talking to someone other than their parents—a family friend, a trusted teacher or school counselor, or someone else they feel close to. Although some parents might object to their children confiding in others and “airing dirty laundry,” the stress that a divorce exerts on a child can be overwhelming. Put your children's health before your own issues and let them confide their fears and concerns to someone they trust.

Know that they know. Many parents believe they can keep their children in the dark about changes such as a job loss or illness, but children hear more and know more than parents expect. The best approach is to acknowledge that they have probably heard something and talk to them about it. Assure them that you'll be there for them if they have questions, and that you're doing all you can to keep things as normal as possible.

Be aware of troubling behaviors. If your child's behavior is suddenly different, it's a sign that he or she is having difficulty coping. Some of the signs that your child needs extra help coping are changes in appetite (either overeating or not eating), changes in sleep (insomnia or constant fatigue), aggressive behavior, constant whining or weeping, depression, bedwetting or thumb

sucking, nervous tics, and a withdrawal from things he or she used to enjoy.

Keep routines. Children need to have routines in their life; they're comforted by them. Do your best to maintain as many of their routines as possible—the same bedtime ritual, for example. And make sure that, even if they're changing households, they get to hold on to some familiar and loved objects—you might be surprised what they choose as a special memento.

Get the book. There are books on almost every situation a child could be faced with. Find children's books at your child's age level that discuss what they're going through (the Mister Rogers series is particularly good for young children).

Information helps. If your child is moving to a new school, house, or community, get as many photos and as much information as possible. Try to do walkthroughs ahead of time and keep your attitude positive, even if you, yourself, have secret concerns. Stress that there will be new and exciting things ahead and you're sure it will be a good change.

Stay connected. If the change involves a move, either within your family or by a close friend, make

sure to assure your children that there are many ways to keep in touch, and that you'll help them stay close to the people who are important to them. From exchanging photos in the mail or online to talking to each other in (supervised) chat rooms, your children will learn that being close doesn't always mean living close by.

Finally, remember that you can't protect a child from change. Coping with change is a learning skill your child needs to master. By providing a listening ear, giving your child the information needed, and staying positive, you are helping your child grow stronger and better prepared for the future, whatever it may bring.

