

## Transitions

By Abby Langmead

There are many crossroads in life, turning points and transitions. Some are made more easily than others, while some require long and hard work. Others are as natural as breathing. But they all remind us that although at times life seems to stand still, the future is always coming.

Whether it be relational, technological advancement or political upheavals, our children will probably face more change in their lives than any other previous generation. They will face challenges to their thinking, wrestling with the familiar ways as well as the unknown. If we take the long term view of parenting the question to ask ourselves is 'How can we best support our children through transitions so that they can deal with changes positively in adulthood'?

In our own family this year we have gone through two transitions: moving countries from the UK to the US, and my son reaching his 13th birthday milestone.

Research shows that how we think about and prepare children for transition greatly affects the outcome. We can either be a bridge or a boulder. As bridges we can help our children link past experiences with the future. By consciously reflecting on prior important events like a favorite holiday, talking about a photograph, a friendship, or a religious or faith ritual that brings meaning, we inadvertently convey the message that in a world of change some important things remain. We connect the threads of the past to the present and future.

As boulders we frustrate the process by not giving children the time and space to express their feelings about change. This can result in anxiety and a sense of hopelessness for the future. Feelings about transition will be mixed with excitement, anxiety, nervousness, and anticipation. Fear of the future often originates in fear of the unknown. We can help children to see what change might look like. If they know we are their emotional bridge, supporting their transitions, they will be confident about feeling ok to say 'this is not ok.' We can literally help translate what is happening for them.

Needham schools have recently reopened and our children have transitioned into another school year. Some have started school for the first time. Accessing transition events at school, talking to other families and buddy systems will all help transitions. It is important to remember that psychological wellbeing and self-esteem is crucial for learning. This comes from a strong sense of love and belonging rooted in family, school and community. They are constant support systems through times of change. Talk to your child about who they can go to if they are worried about changes. Observe any changes in their mood, behavior and check in with school regularly.

Through times of change children especially need their emotional tank to be kept full. Keep encouraging and reminding them that you are walking with them. Help them not to get stuck! Transition is a process of moving forward but it takes time to process it emotionally. Patience and humor are essential. One writer said that change was like a relay race, unless the baton keeps moving forward the team has no chance of success. We can help children by being that bridge and emotional support that lets them walk from one season to another in confidence.

### Useful resources:

-How to make the most of your life transitions, Dr. Shannon Kolakowski (see <http://m.huffpost.com/us/entry/3456314>)

-The Parenting Book by Nicky and Sila Lee Alpha International, 2009

-Why do Kids have trouble with transition? By Katherine Martinelli (see [childmind.org](http://childmind.org))

-Dr Gary Chapman 'Keeping the love tank full' see: <http://www.5lovelanguages.com/2008/10/keeping-the-love-tank-full/>

**Abby Langmead is qualified social worker from the UK, specializing in working with children and families, most recently in Beijing. She is also a child care trainer and educator and a Needham parent of two boys.**