

MANAGING TRANSITIONS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD...



Transitions are a normal part of life, but that doesn't mean they aren't challenging. For children transitions can be a time of uncertainty, stress and anxiety and as parents or caregivers, it is our role to make sure our tamariki are supported and nurtured through these tough times.

IN THIS RESOURCE:

- How to prepare children for transitions
- How to manage the unexpected

TRANSITIONS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Changing education providers, moving house, a new sibling or parental separation are all examples of transitions commonly encountered during early childhood. These experiences can bring about strong emotions in children and often cause children to feel a sense of loss. In these instances, the most beneficial way that parents or caregivers can help tamariki manage, is to prepare them as much as possible.



“TI NOA ANA HE PITO MATA”

From a withered tree, a flower blooms.

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR A TRANSITION

To make transitions as smooth as possible for children, it needs to occur in a safe environment where the child feels secure and ideally has a strong attachment figure to guide them through.

Other key factors include:

- Making a plan - Prepare yourself as much as possible before introducing the transition to the child. Make sure you have as much information as you need and ensure everyone involved is prepared too
- Talking to the child about it - Explain what is happening and why and share age-appropriate stories about the transition
- Keeping to the child's regular routine as much as possible - Too much disruption can increase the child's emotional response. Keeping the number of changes to a minimum can reduce anxiety and increase the child's ability to adapt
- Talking to the child about their emotions - If developmentally able, encourage them to share their emotions with you
- Collaborating - Depending on the type of transition, it is important to work together with everyone involved to minimise the stress on the child. This is especially important when transitions occur in education or family settings
- Considering your child's individual needs - Every child is different and each will have their own ways of coping. Consider your own child's needs and do your best to cater to them to make them as comfortable as possible
- Checking in - Check in with your child during the transition, pay attention to any changes in behaviour or emotional regulation.



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UNEXPECTED TRANSITIONS

While there are some transitions which we can prepare for, there are many that we cannot. Sometimes things happen that are out of our control and they can disrupt our lives in major ways.

When this happens, it's up to us as parents or caregivers to guide our tamariki through the change. While it can be tempting to keep things from our children, with the intention of protecting them, this can actually make children feel worse and increase feelings of anxiety.

It is also imperative that we are aware of and able to manage our own feelings before we can help others with their own.



HOW TO MANAGE WHEN THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

Unexpected events can cause changes to our lives that we neither expect nor want. As adults, this can trigger a strong emotional reaction and it can be incredibly hard to adjust. It is no different for our tamariki.

To help tamariki manage through unexpected transitions, here are some things parents/caregivers can do:

- Talk to your child. Try to explain the situation as best as you can in an age-appropriate manner
- Talk openly about your feelings and encourage your child to talk about their own (if old enough)
- Let your child know that it is okay to feel the way they do and let them know that you support them
- Try your best to keep as much of their routine as normal as possible, this will help maintain a sense of security for your child during uncertain times
- Wrap around the child. Collaborate with everyone else involved with the transition and work together to support the child.

Transitions can be incredibly difficult for tamariki. Young children thrive off consistency so sudden disruptions to their routine can cause feelings of stress, anxiety and loss.

As parents and caregivers, effective communication and plenty of nurturing and support can improve the way in which our tamariki are able to adapt and grow through change.



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