

Parenting Through Transitions

Parenting Strategies – August 2009

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I often think of August as the month where you struggle to both stay still and move forward; in one breath holding on to the long days of summer and in another breath anticipating the parenting responsibilities of the coming academic year. It is in August when I remember first bringing my stepson to college and his ever-expanding list of items that he needed to outfit his dorm room. It is in August when my daughter tells me exactly how many days there are until school begins, and when she asks “Why does school always have to start before the weekend of the fair?”

August is typically a month abundant with family transitions -- children heading to college, a child or two back from summer camp, preparations for coordinating parenting responsibilities in a new school year, changed people and people changing. Sometimes the arrival of fall can bring a sense of ease, and at other times the flurry of transitions continues well into the new year.

The one constant is that transitions are central to every family system. Sometimes we eagerly await them, sometimes they are dreaded, and at other times they catch us entirely by surprise. Whichever the case, there are parenting strategies that you can apply as you experience transitions of all kinds within your family.

Consider the following tips and strategies for parenting during times of transition:

- Seek advice and support from others who are parenting children through similar transitions as those that your child and family are experiencing;
- Get involved with parent offerings (parent association, parent workshops, parent orientation) at your child's school or college;
- Acknowledge the feelings of loss or joy that are part of the transition;

- Evaluate whether you need to change your priorities, and make the necessary changes;
- Transitions are often stressful, even the ones that bring joy, so maintain your overall well-being through self-care (emotional, physical, spiritual);
- Cultivate a sense of preparedness for any anticipated challenges associated with a transition;
- Openly talk about the transitions that your child and family are experiencing – pretending to ignore them will cause great discomfort;
- Consider introducing humor when appropriate;
- Create opportunities for other family members to express their feelings as transitions often have a ripple effect throughout the entire family;
- Take time to explore and learn what you need to know right now to be educated about what you or your pre-college or college student are experiencing;
- If the transition is not particularly pleasant, consistently visualize your hopes for your family system as you move beyond it. Transitions typically have a beginning, middle and end.

For our pre-college and college-aged children, the most common transitions often present the greatest opportunities for their development; and in the pre-college and college years the greatest opportunities usually occur in three areas: personal responsibility; academic development; and relationships with others. Within each of these areas there are multiple events and opportunities for your pre-college or college-aged child to develop life skills, including coping strategies, and a greater sense of resourcefulness. A key to parenting during these transitions is to both stay still and move forward. You will know you have succeeded in parenting through transitions with your children when you move forward enough to guide them, but you also stay still enough to allow your children to have the success of finding their way.