

# NAVIGATING TRANSITIONS WITH EASE

A PRE-SCHOOL CENTRE LEADER, PARENTS, A PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND A PSYCHOLOGIST DISCUSS WAYS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN.



THIS SPREAD On: Suat Kwan: Knitted Long Coat G2000, Tweed Top, Jeans & Suede Flats Forever 21 On: Victoria, Denim Pinfore & White Blouse Seed Heritage On: Shaurya: Navy Bomber Jacket & Raglan Tee GAP Kids, Cotton Joggers Cotton ON Kids, Navy ErgoBag Backpack Ergokid On: Darryl: Monster Colour Book: Roadie Seed Heritage, Light Washed Jeans, Cotton ON Kids On: Elyah: Adidas Pail, Printed Tee KDS PONY, Denim Jacket & Yellow Flare Skin Forever 21 Girl On: Luwen, Top & Jeans G2000 Photo: Hong Ghee, Yen Styling Sharon, Hair assisted by Raja Nurawati Hair & Makeup, Makeup: Ann & Joanne Ong

## WHAT ARE SOME COMMON TRANSITIONS THAT CHILDREN FACE IN THEIR EARLY YEARS?

**Ms Wee Suat Kwan:** Besides the transition from one level to another, such as from K1 to K2 and K2 to Primary 1, there is also change in their environment such as from home to school, and vice versa. With all these, there are also changes in their routines.

**Ms Kelly Lee:** There may also be transitions within the home setting such as a change in caregivers (grandparents to domestic helper, for instance), the arrival of a new sibling, death of a close family member, or a change in the parents' working hours or job requirements that can affect the child.

## PARENTS, HOW DO YOUR CHILDREN RESPOND TO THESE TRANSITIONS?

**Mr Saurabh Gupta:** My son gets anxious, jittery and uneasy when he's unsure about where he's going or what he is expected to do. This happens in any unfamiliar territory, basically.

**Ms Luwen Loo Kui Fang:** My sons are quite adaptable, but I can see it in their faces when they are nervous or apprehensive about being in a new environment. They may cry during the momentary separation period, especially my younger son who is in K1. But when he enters the classroom, he's fine.

## HOW THEN DO YOU HELP THE CHILDREN MANAGE THESE CHANGES?

**Mr Gupta:** I take the time to explain to my son, in as much detail as possible, the new environment. I also answer whatever questions and address any doubts he has about entering the new situation, so he feels prepared for whatever is coming.

**Ms Loo:** What works in my experience is to take away the fear of a new environment by encouraging my children to embrace the excitement that comes with it. My husband and I brought our elder son on a stroll around his new primary school compound even before the school's orientation. At the canteen, we talked about the food stalls he might be keen to try, and that got him excited about going to school. So on his first day, the environment wasn't completely new to him. In fact, he was curious to explore further.

## DO YOU THINK THE PRE-SCHOOL CENTRE AND ITS EDUCATORS HAVE A PART TO PLAY IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN THROUGH VARIOUS TRANSITIONS?

**Mr Gupta:** Yes, my wife and I do have such expectations. My son is fortunate to have

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Ms Luwen Loo, 35, Homemaker

effective teachers who provide him with a steady academic foundation, and who also impart good social etiquette and skills to my son in his interaction with peers.

**Ms Wee:** I think educators have a hand in making these transitions easier for children. Having said that, what is more important is for parents to work in close partnership with us to support their children better.

**Ms Loo:** I think the pre-schools are doing a good job. For example, to teach children how to count money, the pre-school that my son attends organised a movie night. The children had to purchase their own tickets and snacks. My son learnt about simple monetary transactions very early on, so he wasn't intimidated when he had to manage some money after entering Primary 1. The pre-school also instilled in him a positive learning attitude, which gave him a headstart academically.



Mr Saurabh Gupta, 35, IT Consultant, Father of a K2 child



**MS WEE, CAN YOU ELABORATE ON YOUR CENTRE'S STRATEGIES IN HELPING A YOUNG CHILD COPE BETTER?**

**Ms Wee:** We advise parents of toddlers (age 18 months and below), who are entering pre-school for the first time, to bring the child to the centre for about half an hour each time, for a month prior to the start of the semester. This gives the child the opportunity to play with other children and get familiar with the centre's surroundings and its staff. By doing this, we can help to minimise any anxiety or fear the child may have in anticipation of starting pre-school.

We also ensure that the same educators progress with the children as they graduate from one level to the next. Having familiar adults they already trust [around them] gives children a sense of security, as well as the confidence to adjust better to new routines and expectations.

To prepare our K2 children for primary school, the syllabus for Term 4 focuses entirely on going to primary school. Pre-school routines mirror those in a primary school and children are expected to report to the centre earlier than usual. They are

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Ms Wee Suat Kwan, Senior Principal of Pat's Schoolhouse

also encouraged to participate in a silent-reading session before the flag-raising ceremony. Like most pre-schools, we organise field trips to a nearby primary school. It gives children an idea of what their future school may be like and they also get to purchase food from the canteen. We did this in response to parents' feedback for the centre to help support children in this transition from pre-school to primary school.

Parents may want to refer to the "Guide for Parents with Children in Child Care Centres" which can be found online ([www.ecda.gov.sg/Documents/Resources/ParentGuide\\_english.pdf](http://www.ecda.gov.sg/Documents/Resources/ParentGuide_english.pdf)) for useful information on how to better understand and support their children by working together with the educators.

**SO A STRONG PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS IS CRUCIAL?**

**Ms Wee:** Partnership with parents is of paramount importance to us. We take to heart feedback from parents as to how we can work with them to better support their children during transitions. We also share their practical experiences with other parents whose children are about to enter school.

**Mrs Daphne Yeoh:** Indeed it is. In the event that the child displays anxiety symptoms or refuses to

attend school, parents need to work closely with the school and be supportive but firm in ensuring the child goes to school.

**MS LOO, SEEING THAT YOUR ELDER SON HAS BEEN THROUGH THE PRE-SCHOOL TO PRIMARY SCHOOL TRANSITION, CAN YOU SHARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES YOU OR YOUR CHILD FACED DURING THIS TIME?**

**Ms Loo:** His social circle, in a short time, got a lot bigger and more diverse when he entered primary school. His peers have a wide range of temperaments and personalities, and interactions with some of them were more challenging. As a parent, I do not want to dictate who he should make friends with because I don't want him to see the world through my eyes. So I instil in him values like honesty and generosity, and hope he uses his heart to decide and his head to analyse who he wants to befriend in school and beyond.

**DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR PARENTS IN MANAGING CHANGES OR TRANSITIONS?**

**Ms Lee:** When there are changes, it is common for children to have mixed emotions of anxiety and sadness. These are usually caused by unforeseen circumstances and unfamiliar situations. We need to acknowledge that this is part of life and be supportive of our children.

**Ms Wee:** Children may cry at the start as they need to express their anxiety and require some time to settle down. Trust the centre's educators and be assured that we want to provide a stable and warm environment for the children. Be positive and your children will adapt a lot faster.

**Mrs Yeoh:** Help your child to feel secure by having routines at home and talking enthusiastically about school. Do not be anxious. Children are able to pick up such feelings from their parents, and they will then feel anxious themselves. Be careful with what you say to other adults about your misgivings as your child may be listening. ❤️

Ms Kelly Lee, Senior Psychologist at the National University Hospital



**SYMPTOMS AND STRATEGIES**

Ms Kelly Lee, Senior Psychologist from the National University Hospital, offers her expertise:

Look out for these symptoms of stress or anxiety in your child:

- ▶ Change in mood (E.g. Prone to crying)
- ▶ Regressive behaviours (E.g. A four-year-old acting more like a two-year-old)
- ▶ Poor sleep and frequent nightmares
- ▶ Loss of appetite or weight
- ▶ Loss of interest in usual favorite activities
- ▶ Lack of willingness to socialise where previously there was no problem

Key strategies to manage your child's stress or anxiety:

- 1 Listen and Communicate**  
Listen and understand his concerns about the change. Take the time to explain to your child the reasons for the changes he is experiencing. Encourage him to verbalise his feelings.
- 2 Acknowledge and Affirm**  
Address your child's feelings and reassure him that some anxiety or sadness is to be expected. Validate his concerns instead of brushing these aside and asking him to "get used to it".
- 3 Pre-empt and Prepare**  
Alleviate your child's apprehension about the new situation by taking him through what the change may entail. If he is starting a new pre-school, bring him to the centre's compound and premises to get familiar with the new environment.
- 4 Support and Strengthen**  
Offer encouragement and praise his behaviour or actions in facing the challenges that come with the change.

**DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY**

Anxious for your soon-to-be primary school-going child? Daphne eases some pressing concerns.

MOST, IF NOT ALL, PRIMARY SCHOOLS CONDUCT ORIENTATION for incoming pupils prior to their first day. This session not only provides parents with information about the school, but also familiarises children with the school premises, teachers and their new classmates.

INCOMING P1 STUDENTS ARE GIVEN SUPPORT with older buddies assigned to help them buy food from the canteen and navigate the school grounds, in the first week or so. The school counsellor and student development team in the schools also help students who experience anxiety and stress.

TEACHERS RARELY PLUNGE INTO THE CURRICULUM ON DAY ONE but instead spend more time orientating the children, thus providing enjoyable experiences. These include playing games, story-telling and visiting interesting places in the school like the library, computer laboratory and the school playground.

Mrs Daphne Yeoh, 51, Principal of Sengkang Green Primary School



COVER On Darryl: Uniform Stylist's Own, Navy Erogab Backpack, Ergokid On Saurabh: Bomber Jacket, Chino Pants & Sneakers Mark's and Spencer: Stripe Polo Shirt GAP On Luwen: White Shirt & Orange Drawing Dress UNIQLO, Cuff & High Heels Forever 21 On Victoria: Yellow Ruffle Dress, Bow Headband and Tassel Sandals Seed Heritage On Suat Kwan: Floral Blazer & Suede Flats Forever 21, Mustard Blouse & Tapered Pants G2000 On Elijiah: Hearts Pullover H&M, Spots Jeans GAP Baby

THIS SPREAD On Saurabh: Yellow Raglan Tee GAP Kids On Saurabh: Knitted Brown Pullover Mark's and Spencer On Suat Kwan: White Shirt UNIQLO, Tweed Top Forever 21