



So you want to know more about...

Transitions

Which Way Do We Go?

When a child changes care settings, he will experience many challenges: a new environment, new caregivers, new children to interact with and share space, and a whole slate of new materials, activities, and routines. Children are generally quite resilient, but long-anticipated transitions can cause anxiety for kids *and* parents. **Children take their cues from adults, so parents can do many things to ease the emotional and physical stress of transitions.**

Always accentuate the positive. How will this change benefit your child and your family? If your child is old enough to talk about and understand the move, encourage him to share any concerns and make a plan together to address them. If your child is nonverbal, a parent's confident posture, breathing, and facial expressions

will help the child understand that the new setting is a positive one.

Adults should anticipate setbacks. A new setting can initially be exciting enough to override anxiety about the change. Once the newness factor wears off and the child realizes the move is "permanent," he may object to separating in the morning or unload at pick-up time. You may see clingy or "immature" behaviors at home or disturbances in sleep or eating patterns. All these reactions are perfectly normal and healthy signs that your child is adjusting to change. Reminding yourself they're likely to happen **before** you actually have to deal with them can help you remain confident about the new setting and rational about coping strategies.

Adults can support children by showing them the ways they are ready for new challenges. When a child regresses, he or she is saying, "I don't feel confident," or "I don't know how I fit into this setting." Parents can help children **predict** some changes: "In preschool, you will have your own cubby and it will be your job to hang up your own coat." You can also help children **practice** similar routines at home to increase **confidence**. At the center, let your child see you connect happily with other adults in the classroom and with children. As your child abandons any regressive behaviors, reward him with praise and additional "big kid" privileges.

Moving Up: In-House Transitions

We recommend that parents whose children start at our centers as infants and toddlers **visit the older classrooms** before their child reaches transition age. Viewing programs in action can help parents see how their child might fit in, and/or identify some skills they may need to work on with their child before a move. Because our curriculum is *emergent*, we generally try to adapt our activities to meet the needs of children where they are, rather than expecting them to fit into a pre-established curriculum. Parents with specific developmental concerns can review our guidelines and speak to the staff.

For children who are transitioning to a new program in the same building, primary caregivers will act as facilitators, introducing children to the new classroom and teachers. Your child's current teachers should be able to give you an idea of how your child will experience the transition and offer suggestions for ways you can support her. When your child knows that a whole team of adults is available to meet her needs, she will feel more comfortable expressing her anxieties and learning to move beyond them. Together, we're better.

How We Facilitate Transitions at Gretchen's House

Each time a child enrolls in a Gretchen's House program, we:

- Ask parents to fill out a **family profile**. This gives us an idea of your child's individual needs and interests, as well as any particular cultural, emotional, or other situational preferences.
- Create a "spot" for your child in the classroom, including a labeled cubbie, mailbox, and sleeping area with crib, mat or cot (as age appropriate).
- Encourage parents to send photos from home to use in our classroom displays.
- Take pictures of your child engaged in play, because they behave differently at pick-up and drop-off than they do when our activities are in full swing and parents aren't around.
- Give parents a brief phone call after any rough drop-off to let you know your child has settled in, or schedule a longer chat during planning time.

Children who are moving to another classroom within the center will have plenty of opportunities to meet their new classmates and teachers and explore the spaces before a move. Your child's teachers will provide you with a transitioning plan, daily schedules for the new classroom, and information about specific needs for the new program. Parents can facilitate a smooth transition by keeping morning and evening routines as normal as possible. If your child regresses, you should acknowledge her anxiety but don't feed it. An extra hug or two is great; a distraught or crying parent is confusing.

Families who are enrolling at the center for the first time are encouraged to visit at least once so your child can see you comfortable in the setting and explore the space with you as a safe base. Children moving from home-based care to center based care will be looking for familiarity. Comfort objects, family photos, and favorite clothes help children feel secure in the new setting. Children may become more dependent on a comfort object that they had virtually discarded at home, or may look for a new comfort object. The object itself isn't important, but the freedom to cling to something that reminds them of home and comfort is. Most children will ease the use of transitional objects as they become more comfortable with the new situation.

Difficulty Separating

If separating from your child becomes difficult after a change in care, ask your child's teachers and/or the center director for suggestions. Each child is different, but adjustment follows predictable patterns. When teachers and parents have a consistent drop-off routine, children tend to adapt to it within a couple of weeks. Some children have a delayed reaction to the change, but they tend to adjust at the same speed, within a couple of weeks. Read the **Easier Drop-offs and Separation Anxiety Purple Pages** for more suggestions. For more information on our approach to other developmental challenges and family concerns, please browse our extensive Purple Pages collection (available online and at the centers) and the Parent Libraries in each center.

Frequently Asked Questions

I think/don't think my child is ready to transition.

How do you make these decisions? We primarily transition children according to the school calendar, or in June and September. Detailed developmental inventories help us use concrete behaviors to guide our placements. We look at individual children's development and how they will fit in with their new peer group. You can find developmental guidelines by age group on our website.

I'm not crazy about my child's new teacher.

Transitions are hard for adults as well as children. You'll have to adapt to new teaching methods, communication styles, and curriculum. It helps to keep your child's needs foremost in your mind: if your child is comfortable and engaged, it may not matter whether you **love** his new teacher or not. Please read the **Resolving Caregiving Conflicts** purple page for specific suggestions. Because we consider children's developmental needs when placing them in programs and selecting a primary caregiver, it is

rarely the case that a placement simply won't work. Rather, teachers and adults can work together to brainstorm ways to facilitate a good working relationship.

Why do you use mixed-age groups? Imagine parenting quintuplets versus parenting five children each a year apart! Mixed-age classes reduce the "pack mentality" that can happen when several children go through a challenging phase such as hitting, for example. It also allows children to help others, develop pro-social behaviors, and scaffold their learning with what is going on around them.

I don't want my child to be the oldest/youngest in a room. Some parents worry that older children's needs won't be met or younger children will be left behind, but we plan *emergent curriculum*, which responds to the developmental needs of each child within the group. Read the **Emergent Curriculum** purple page for more info.