

CHANGING GEARS

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It won't be long before school ends for the year and some children will be going to new schools. I vividly remember changing schools. It was exciting and yet a little scary. Each school level change brought excitement as well as challenges.

What is exciting about going to a new school? There's meeting new kids, having a different school to explore, experiencing new teachers and learning new stuff. There are also scary aspects to starting at a new school. Being in a new place and a new situation takes a child out of their comfort zone. There is the fear of the unknown. Previously they were familiar with 'the program', the teachers and friends, but now they have to face new routines, new schoolwork, new teachers and new friendships. All of these things bring the fear of not meeting expectations - expectations set by their teachers, their new friends and sometimes their parents.

Most children become very stressed over too much change all at once. While parents anticipate their kids will be excited about going from elementary to middle school, or middle to high school, they often forget their own anxiety as their children face drastic changes.

These kids have to learn to change gear as they progress through grade levels. They are expected to grasp concepts more quickly. With less personal coaching they are expected to keep up with the rest of the class. There are less second chances, and much shorter grace periods for making mistakes. They have to learn to work on their own, be self-motivated and self-sustaining. With new friendships they have to establish their place in the group, and that often challenges their self worth. Teens in particular are very sensitive about how they appeal to others, so they measure their worth on what they perceive others think about them. They may have been big fish where they came from in the last school, but suddenly, in a new group, they are the minnows.

Shy children find it particularly difficult to approach new situations. It takes them a long time to feel confident. A child has a real advantage in being an extrovert. Such children find friends quickly whereas kids with quiet, reticent personalities find it much more difficult.

It is very important to prepare your children for major changes in their lives. Tell them what they are likely to experience in a new school. Suggest ways they can make new school friends and what kind of friendships they should foster. Encourage them to work independently and to finish projects. Ensure they are in the habit of doing homework. Show them how to research subjects on the computer. Be a constant learner yourself so you are an example to your kids as to how much fun it is to learn new stuff – at any age. Be interested in

their new school experiences and praise them for their successes. Help them through their concerns. Observe them carefully for signs of undue stress and address it immediately.

School days hold treasured memories. We can help our children traverse their educational years successfully by preparing them for changes through our constant encouragement and continued support.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.