

Transitions

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Transition means a change, or “a passage from one state...to another...” In many instances, it can be as benign as it sounds – moving from one phase to another or from one spot to another. “Transition” sometimes implies something not terribly painful, just a “slide” over into something different.

The beginning of a new school year will be a transition for students of all ages, along with their family members. Being promoted to a higher grade, leaving elementary school for middle school, and transferring to high school from middle school are all ways of moving from one stage to another. Preparing for this “passage” can even be fun, when students might get to shop for new clothes, gather notebooks and pens, and (dare I say) iPads to start back to school at the end of summer. But part of the preparation for this move can also cause some severe anxiety, and it can remain hidden and create obstacles for everyone concerned.

Sometimes the transition from one grade to another can be a crisis for some students. I recall a girl in middle-school was very fearful of moving to high school because the students who were bullying her were also moving to that school. She was anxious and afraid because the school was much larger and she thought that the bullies would encourage more students to harass her, too. She had not told her parents or school staff about being bullied, and it required some convincing to just have her agree to talk to the principal. Zero tolerance for bullying is not effective when victims will not reveal it.

Another student, a friend of a relative, was enrolled in a different elementary school last year. It was very difficult being separated from her friends and routine. Now she is reportedly very upset and depressed about having to go back there this year because she is lonely and conflicts with a female bully. It seems she does not want to upset her parents and has not shared her emotional pain with them. She talks to some girlfriends and swears them to secrecy. Looking forward to the “transition” back to school is not a pleasant anticipation for her either.

We can help children by encouraging them to share their fears and concerns and help them “figure out” how they might deal with new issues that might come up – whether they are starting at a new school, carrying their fears back with them, or handling problems while they are there. It is often hard to discern the reasons for childhood stress in “moving up,” and finding out requires some active listening with a non-judgmental attitude. Students need to be able to share their thoughts about how things will be when they “transition” on to the new school year. The real sources of their stress can stay hidden for a long time and show up in “acting out” issues.

This first step in getting through “transitions” is allowing and helping our children (and ourselves) to “feel your feelings” and communicate about them. In the same way, we can talk about our own emotions with someone whom we trust. Pushing feelings away or denying fear and worry is not being honest with ourselves and, actually, not honest with the Lord.

Encourage students in your family to share their feelings with God also, because He understands change and emotion. And even if you feel you have been forced into a life change that you did not ask for and do not want...the Lord is big enough to handle hearing about that...especially if you are secretly casting the blame on Him. He is a Father, and strong enough to handle hearing our pain.

As families “transition” into a new school year, let us be sensitive to the stress that change can create for students, parents, siblings, and friends – and spend some time communicating about how everyone is being impacted. It might not be as “ordinary” or as smooth as it appears.

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