

Storytelling to Help Children Cope with Changes in Schools and Daycares

Talking with your child about their new routine and new daycare setting is important. Creating a new “normal” for them is crucial because children’s brains thrive on predictable patterns. With this pandemic our daily and weekly routines have been flipped upside down. Creating a new normal can begin by simply talking with your child about their new daycare center. Know that with any change or transition there will be ups and downs. It is typical that children will experience challenging behaviors while adjusting to their new care setting. This can be frustrating for both children and adults.

Why does storytelling/narration work?

We have two sides to our brain, the right and the left, that function very differently. The right side of our brain specializes in emotions, images and personal memories. The right side of the brain communicates by sending and receiving nonverbal communication such as eye contact, body posture and tone of voice. The left brain is logical, linear, literal and linguistic. It likes facts, words and order. Children, especially children under the age of 3, are right brain dominated. When children become upset, they become even more right-brain dominated. Storytelling or narration help bring together the right and left side of the brain.¹ As a result, you see children calm. In addition, storytelling can help children understand what is happening and what will happen next, leaving them feeling safe and less anxious. More importantly, it is an opportunity for you and your child to connect.

What to include in your story?

1. Name the Change: “You used to go to this school with Ms. Robin. Now you are going to a new school and your teacher will be Ms. Lou. The classroom will look different with different toys and different friends.”
2. Name the Feeling: “I know that you may have lots of feelings about this change. Maybe you are excited, sad or scared.”
3. Provide Reassurance: “Your new school is different, and you will still be safe.”
4. Name what is consistent: “Even though lots of things are different, you will still learn and play at your school. Mommy will always drop you off and daddy will always pick you up.”
5. Offer support and skills: “If you become upset, you can talk to Ms. Lou, you can take a deep breath and say to yourself “I can do it” and you can always talk to me.”

How to use storytelling

Some children may need to hear the story multiple times. They may even need to hear it multiple times a day! It may be helpful to share the story in the evening and in the morning before school. As you tell

¹ Siegel, D. J. & Bryson, T.A. (2012). *The whole-brain child*. New York: Bantam Books Trade Paperbacks

the story make sure that you pause to ask and answer questions. Be present and enjoy this time together.

Creative ideas for storytelling

1. Write the words of the story on blank pieces of paper and ask your child to draw the pictures.
2. Use your child's favorite action figures or dolls to act out the story.
3. Take pictures of your child doing various actions in their new routine. Use these pictures to create a visual schedule that represents his/her new routine
4. Take a field trip. Drive by the new school prior to his/her first day. Make time to tell your child about his/her new school.

Be Prepared for challenges

Know that with any change or transition there will be ups and downs. It is typical that children will experience challenging behaviors while adjusting to their new care setting. This can be frustrating for both children and adults. It is important to name the feelings that your child is experiencing. It can be helpful to say "I know it is frustrating to have to go to a new school and make all new friends, and we are going to get through this". Or "I know you are sad that you cannot go back to your same school, you are so brave for trying something new!"

Be their safe place

"The brain functions optimally when it feels both safe and connected. Children need to know that life is going to be different and that you will find a new normal together. Make safety and connection your top priority, especially in the first days; you can always add academics, chores and such later. Notice whatever your child is doing and join in their play. Go outside and play. Get down on the floor and play. Wrestle. Giggle. Snuggle. Hug, high five and enjoy. Connection isn't just good for your mood; it builds neural connections in your child's brain and increases cooperation."²

Call our Warm Line at (303)245-4418 for additional support.

² Bailey, B. (2020). "COVID-19: Five helpful responses for families." *Conscious Discipline*.
https://consciousdiscipline.com/covid-19-five-helpful-responses-for-families/?mc_cid=89fc7c1740&mc_eid=7b2ae2409a