Riding the Waves of Transition

Everywhere parents turn, there are transitions, some of which are more recognizable than others. The following are some of the transitions that may have touched your life, directly or indirectly, over the past month:

- Having a child enter a new developmental phase (e.g., adolescence, the "terrible twos")
- Finding out that another child is on the way
- Changing schools or day care providers
- Questioning a current career or work status
- Moving into different living arrangements
- Ending a relationship or entering a new phase of marriage
- Learning to be a single parent

Sometimes you ease into a transition, but others times you’re thrown in, struggling to find the life preserver. Some transitions are short, while others make you wonder if the end will ever come. Transitions can be unwelcome and unexpected; transitions can also be a planned breath of fresh air. No matter how you get into a transitional period of your life, here are some tips to help navigate your way through transitions.

Ride the wave.

A transition is like an ocean wave, with its ups and downs. Get your balance and integrate the changes into your daily life. Take it slow so you don’t fall down and overwhelm yourself. Give yourself some time to get used to the wave—you don’t learn to surf overnight. You won’t transition in 1 or 2 days. Expect the waters to be a little rough at first; this will help you adjust your expectations.

Look for and embrace the highs.

Every transition, wanted or not, has positive moments or outcomes. Your job is to search for and recognize them. There have been tears during many children’s kindergarten transition, but maybe your little one made a new friend or didn’t cry at recess today. Celebrate each moment of progress and joy. Embracing the positive gives you the energy to muddle through the lows.

Accept the muck.

It’s pretty yucky in the muck, but certainly a necessary and normal part of transitions. If you don’t wade through the muck, how can you appreciate its opposite—getting clear? Confusion is often a part of transitions that most people would rather avoid. If you can relax and accept the
confusion for what it is, clarity will come. Use the confusion to search your soul and discover new things about yourself and life. The mucky water will soon become crystal clear.

**Make it a lesson in learning.**

What can you learn from a transition? As you struggle to deal with your 2-year-old’s newfound independence, what are you learning about yourself as a parent? What do you know about 2-year-olds and what is yet to learn? Transitions are great opportunities to learn more about who you are and aren’t. It’s a chance to grow and stretch yourself. Sure, it can be uncomfortable at first, but the end result is a better you, a more mature outlook, an expanded vision of life, or a transformative revelation. A transition is merely another chapter in your life’s lesson book.

**There is a light at the end of the tunnel.**

Transitions do not last forever. It’s true you can get stuck for a while, but eventually there is a light at the end of the tunnel. A 2-year-old turns 3. The pain of divorce goes away. The learning curve at the beginning of a new job fades and is replaced with routine. The new house in the new town becomes home.

You don’t have to wait until the transition is over to experience the “light.” The light can come in the form of support throughout your transitional time. Your light is your hope that things can be normal again. Reach out to loving family members and friends, professionals, and mentors that can help you through.

There is one thing for sure: If you’re not in a transition today, you will be eventually. So ride the wave, embrace the highs, accept the muck, and capture the lessons. Transitions are a normal part of life, and you will get through them.

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