



Parenting the Preschooler

Social Competence & Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheets

How do you help your child cope with changes?

Ages & Stages

PRESCCHOOLER A child who is 3 to 5 years of age.

YOUNG CHILD A child who is 0 to 8 years of age.

Minding Our Language

Families come in all shapes, sizes, and styles. A “family” may include people who are related by blood, by marriage, and by choice. “Parents” may be biological, step-, foster, adoptive, legally appointed, or something else. When we use the words “family” and “parent” in these materials, we do so inclusively and with great respect for all adults who care for and work with young people.

For preschool-aged children, changes or transitions can be hard. Some changes involve physical moves, such as a move to a new home or school building. Others involve changes with important adults in their lives, such as having a new teacher or caregiver at child care, starting school, or a bigger family change, like divorce.

Changes and transitions can be stressful for children and they often need time to get used to new situations. However, the new experiences can be important and can help your child learn patience and gain self-confidence. Experiencing transitions can also encourage your child to be more open to new people and ideas and help improve their relationship and social skills.

To help your child learn to cope with changes and transitions, try some of the following:

- Talk about the change that is about to happen. Ask your child if they understand how things will be different and ask how they are feeling. Talk about how things will be different, but also about how some things may stay the same.
- Share your excitement about the transition. Say positive things and tell your child about all of the great new things they will learn and do because of the transition.
- Help your child name their feelings about the change. Encourage them to use feeling words, such as “mad,” “sad,” “angry,” “excited,” or “nervous.” Talk about how they can deal with their feelings about the change in a positive way.
- Read a book about the transition. Visit your local library or bookstore together and find a book about the change that your child is about to go through. After reading the story, ask them what the characters in the book did to help get through the change.
- Draw pictures together. Offer paper and crayons and help your child draw a picture about the new change. They can draw a picture of a new home, a new school, or even a baby brother or sister that may be coming.
- Create a calendar. Start a countdown for the important change using a calendar that you make together. Be sure to place a special sticker or drawing on the day of the change. Your child can mark off the days before starting school or count the days until a family move.
- Tell your child a story about something in your life that changed when you were little. Describe your first day of school, moving to a new state, or another change that is similar to what your child will experience. Talk to them about how you felt and what you did to handle the change.

- Give your child something that they can take with them to comfort them. Cut a small piece of their blanket for them to tuck in their pants pocket. Write a short note or draw a picture on a napkin for their lunchbox. Give them a picture of you or your family to keep in a pocket to pull out and look at when they begin to feel sad or anxious.
- Make up a secret handshake or sign with your hands that only the two of you share. Show your child the secret sign or do your handshake with them each time you say goodbye.
- Keep your normal routine as consistent as possible. It's important for your child to understand that not everything in life will change at the same time. They will have an easier time with the transition if their daily routines – like bedtime, bath time, and dinner time – stay the same.

Find Out More

MSU Extension provides the following resources for parents and caregivers of preschoolers and young children at no or low cost. Be sure to check out these and other MSU Extension resources available at www.extension.msu.edu.

Extension Extras (<https://bit.ly/2LC2vdX>) – These compilations of news articles, activities, parenting tips and advice are published online Monday through Friday. The resources are designed for parents and caregivers of young children who are home all day during the novel coronavirus pandemic. Each day has a theme: Mindful Mondays, Tips on Tuesday, Working Wednesdays, Thinking Thursday, and Fun Fridays.

Extension Extras Enrichment Kits (<https://bit.ly/35QAplQ>) – These kits feature five or six early childhood activities with learning goals focused in areas such as social and emotional health, literacy, and STEM; a supply list; suggested children's books; introduction letters explaining how to use the materials; and an evaluation. The kits are available as free downloads.

Early Childhood Videos (<https://bit.ly/3ioyEkS>) – These short videos offer parents and caregivers of young children information on parenting topics. Titles include "Perspective Taking," "Family Movies," "Goals of Misbehavior," "Using Thinking and Feeling Words," "The Waiting Game," and "When Siblings Fight."

Building Early Emotional Skills (BEES) in Young Children (<https://bit.ly/38XW4KI>) – This page provides links to a variety of free online parenting courses, workshops, and events offered by MSU Extension for parents and caregivers of young children aged 0 to 3.

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