

Learning Links' Tip Sheet

Helping Children Cope With Change



Some children have trouble coping with changes in routine. Children with autism spectrum disorder in particular find changes extremely difficult and you may need special help beyond these tips.

If you have a child who seems to have trouble coping with change, try to give your child plenty of preparation time when you know something out of routine is to occur. For example, "After lunch we are going to walk to the shops".

Adults can also help children learn to cope with change by specifically making small changes to routines to give the child practice eg eating morning tea on a mat on the floor rather than at a table. Adults can model flexible behaviour; peers can also provide good visual cues of what to do and how to manage the changes.

Talk to your child about what is going to happen and when. If possible use pictures or photos of what is happening to visually reinforce what you are saying. Take the pictures with you.

For example, if you are going to the shops and you know it is only a small shop requiring a basket not a trolley, tell your child what will happen and also show him or her a picture. Sometimes it is also good to show them a picture of what will happen after the shopping, such as pictures of getting into the car and coming home.

Explanations may need repeating. Just once will often not be enough to reassure your child that everything is all right.

Children love routines and they are good for children. However, slight variations regularly, as long as they are talked about beforehand to the child, are also useful and a good example of life situations that often change.

The information in Learning Links' Tip Sheets is prepared by experienced early childhood professionals. Each child is unique and this material is not necessarily suitable for every child, parent or carer. We recommend you discuss this information with your child's therapist or education professional prior to using these tips.

