

Transitions and Third Culture Kids

Whether you are beginning or ending your time at ISD, your child is facing a transition: A new school; a new country; a new educational institution; or even a new grade. Or perhaps somebody close to your child is facing a transition and your child is struggling with being left behind. This article provides some information to help you to support your child through these transitions.

What are the stages involved in a transition?

David Pollock (co-author of the book *Third Culture Kids*) believes that we go through the following stages when faced with a transition:

1. **Involvement.** The first stage involves feeling settled and comfortable in a place that we know; we feel like we belong and know where we fit in.
2. **Leaving.** The second stage is marked by the realization that we will be leaving our place of comfort. As we realize this, we may begin leaning away from our responsibilities, commitments and relationships. There are often mixed emotions during this stage. For example, we may feel both anxious about leaving and excited about moving to a new place.
3. **Transition.** This stage begins when we actually leave our place of comfort and ends when we make the conscious decision to settle into the new place. During this stage we may be confronted with chaos and stress.
4. **Entering.** This stage begins when we feel ready to become part of life in the new place. We begin to figure out how we should go about becoming accepted, start to reach out to others and take some risks.
5. **Re-involvement.** Finally, we reach the stage where we feel accepted in the new place. We begin to have the feeling that our presence matters and that we belong.

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How can you support your child through a transition?

- **Educate yourself about transitions.** The books listed under *Transitions* under the *Additional Reading Materials* section at the end of this article are a good place to start to learn more about transitions.
- **Maintain some sort of stability.** For example, keeping certain traditions or rituals that your family does no matter where you are or encouraging your child to bring his/her favourite possessions from place to place may help protect from the instability often associated with a transition.
- **Acknowledge and mourn any losses.** Often we forget to pay attention to what we have lost in a transition. It is very important to acknowledge your child's feelings as grief can pose a problem when it is left unresolved.
- **Focus on the present.** Transitions may bring much uncertainty and dwelling too much on what the future may bring, may result in stress. Help your child learn how to focus on the present to avoid this stress. One effective way to do this is to practice mindfulness techniques. Check out the books listed under *Mindfulness* under the *Additional Reading Materials* section for more information about mindfulness.
- **Help your child build a RAFT.** The acronym RAFT, is an easy way to remember how to obtain healthy closure:

Reconciliation: When we hear that we are leaving, it is often easy to ignore any interpersonal difficulties we may be having. However, these difficulties do not go away when we leave and this mental baggage may even affect our future relationships. Therefore, it is very important to resolve any conflicts before we leave. In order to do this, we need to both forgive and be forgiven.

Affirmation: By acknowledging the influence of a person in our lives, relationships can be built and maintained. This can involve identifying special teachers, friends and family members and acknowledging them for example with notes and/or gifts.

Farewells: It is important to say good-bye to people, places, pets and things that are important to us. This may involve for example giving somebody a gift, attending a party for people we want to say goodbye to, planting a tree in your favourite spot or taking pictures of what we cherish.

Think Destination: Finally, it is imperative to begin thinking about the future destination by asking questions about it and considering what resources you will have there to aid with the transition. It may for example be helpful to research the new place online and/or get in contact with other families in the new destination.

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Do you have any questions about transitions? Please contact your child's counsellor.

Additional Reading Materials

Transitions

Expat Teens Talk by Dr. Lisa Pittman and Diana Smit

The Expert Expat by Melissa Brayer Hess and Patricia Linderman

The Global Nomads Guide to University Transition by Tina L. Quick

Third Culture Kids by David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken

Mindfulness

A Pebble for Your Pocket by Thich Nhat Hanh

Mindful Movements by Thich Nhat Hanh

The Mindful Child by Susan Greenland