

Supporting Transition and Change for Our Kids!

- Acknowledge the loss and sadness, and/or the excitement and anticipation, of leaving Grade 4. Talk with your child about the feelings associated with leaving and starting something new. Do not judge the feelings, rather make space for your child to share all of their feelings.
- Plan ahead where possible. Begin a gradual process in August that can support routines related to sleep/waking that supports school attendance.
- Focus on the basics of SLEEP, NUTRITION and PHYSICAL ACTIVITY that we know help us better regulate our discomfort and stress response.
- Practice walking to school so the route is familiar or drive by the school so your student knows where the bus will drop them off and can see what doors they can use.
- Normalize the expected experience of stress with change. Talk with them about what can help them feel better for the first couple days of school (ie; special snacks, special item of clothing/hat; special small object for comfort).
- Tell your child the name of their teacher and help them practice asking for help if needed (role-play with them what words they can use so it is more comfortable).
- Offer the choices available to your child that ARE a part of the transition and that they can have a voice in. For example: picking out a new backpack/lunch kit, deciding what to wear on the first day of school, lunch/snack choices, etc. Giving choice (where possible and reasonable) can help children have an increased sense of control. This is important as there are many things about the school transition that they may not have control over (who is in their class, who the teacher is, when lunchtime is, etc.).
- Make communication about their feelings, experiences and concerns, a regular daily part of interactions with them. Be curious with them and ask open-ended questions such as: "Tell me about what school was like today? What were some of the good/hard things about today?"
- Role play basic social skills with your child (i.e. how to initiate play and make friends etc.) in order for your child to feel a sense of belonging and form connection and positive relationships with their peers.
- It is common for the transition process to take some time (even a month or more), though here are some indicators of stress to watch for:
 - Frequent episodes of crying
 - Sleep difficulties or changes in sleep habits for your child
 - Changes to eating habits (eating more or less than typical for your child, restricting foods, notable changes in dietary habits)
 - Withdrawal from activities that previously were enjoyable

- Isolation from peers, family and increased periods of being on alone
- Negative self-talk about skills, abilities or competence
- Regular complaints about not feeling well, physical symptoms with no known cause
- School refusal
- If you have concerns about how the transition is going for your child, reach out early in the school year to your School Team (classroom teacher, principal, vice-principal, Guidance Counsellor, Learning Support Teacher) so that concerns and needs can be addressed and support can be provided as soon as possible.

Provided by: Divisional School Social Work Clinicians, Student Services, Hanover School Division