Transitions Are Always Tough

Recently I posted my top 10 tips for parenting success. Now, I am elaborating on each item on the list. Parenting Tip #2 is this:

Allow at least 5-10 minutes of transition both at the beginning and end of changing circumstances.

Transitions are always tough…for all of us. For children in particular, quickly jumping from one activity to the next can throw them for a loop. Giving children a 5-10 minute heads-up before a change, and 5-10 minutes to de-brief after a change, can go a long way toward their acceptance of the changing circumstances. Without such transition time, you likely may have to deal with attitude, disrespect, stalling, and other forms of acting out.

“Oh, my gosh!” Kelly’s mom popped out of bed after sleeping through her alarm. “Kelly, baby,” she called out. “Sweetheart, we overslept. Hurry. Get up. You’ll be late for school.”

Kelly turned over in her bed and pulled the covers up around her neck. “Huh?” She mumbled, “Whaaat?”

Mom raced to Kelly’s room, explaining again to her, rousted her from her sleep, and helped her seven year old get dressed. Breakfast was a toaster pop-up and juice bag in the car on the way to school. Kelly grumbled as she got out of the car, dragging her feet through the school doorway, just as the first bell rang.

Like most parents, you’ve probably been there, done that. Unfortunately, what follows is likely a bad school day for Kelly. Her good night’s sleep was disrupted by her rapid wake-up call. Her breakfast was speed dialed and unnutritious. Without adequate transition and adjustment to changing circumstances, her response time in class is likely stalled. Not the best of beginnings to what might have been a productive school day.

Of course, this scenario falls under the “stuff happens” category. Not much you can do except make the best of it. Here’s hoping mom at least apologized to Kelly on the way to school and tried to help her settle into her day.

When possible, however, give your child at least a 5-10 minute heads-up before change and a similar debriefing after change.

“Darling, remember that you have a doctor’s appointment at 4 PM after school today. When you come in from the school bus around 3:15, let’s have some milk and cookies for settle down time before we go to your appointment.”

And, after the appointment, “So, how did that go? Do you have any questions the doctor didn’t answer? How do you feel about the lotion she gave you for your itchiness? Do you want to help me make supper tonight?”

Such before/after conversations help smoothen transitions and lessen the likelihood of blowback. While transitions can be tough, you can help ease your child through them.