



Timely Information for Personal Success

What Children can Teach Us about Change

By Phyllis L. Fagell

On the day my oldest child graduated from preschool, I startled myself by bursting into tears in a hallway lined with crayon drawings. I felt an instant sense of nostalgia. A teacher with older children of her own stopped to comfort me. From here on out, she noted wistfully, time would only pick up speed. I knew my child would transition just fine to kindergarten, but I wasn't so sure about myself.

That child is now about to go to high school. He is the same age as the eighth grade students I counsel at a middle school. Lately, I have been meeting with parents who feel the weightiness of the impending transition to ninth grade. I have learned to expect occasional tears. As I hand over tissues, they often share how surprised they are by their emotional response, believing they left that rawness behind in the baby phase.

Change is Difficult

I get it. It's a feeling that strikes at unexpected times. Like when we bump into a mom from a long-ago baby play group. Change is hard. As parents, it can seem like we are perpetually readying our children for life's next challenge. We hold our breath at class plays when they pause a bit too long before reciting their lines. When they get knocked down on the soccer field, we resist the urge to instantly run to their side. Our ability to protect wanes as they age, but the urge doesn't diminish.

How Our Kids Think Differently

When it comes to coping with change, children are the best teachers. Their job is to march through life's phases, and they often do it unquestioningly and without a backwards glance. This is how they do it:

❖ **Kids keep it simple.** Children are less likely to overthink, to ruminate over a scenario. They

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Healthy Recipe: Ginger-Cranberry-Raspberry Relish

INGREDIENTS:

One 12-ounce package fresh cranberries
½ cup granulated sugar
½ cup crystallized ginger, minced
3 cups raspberries (2 pints), fresh or frozen (not thawed)

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

Calories per serving: 58
Carbohydrates: 15 g.
Protein: 0 g.
Sodium: 2 mg.
Fat: 0 g.
Fiber: 2 g.



DIRECTIONS:

❶ Pulse cranberries in a food processor until coarsely chopped. Transfer to a medium bowl. Stir in sugar and crystallized ginger. Gently stir in raspberries – it's fine to crush some of them.

❷ Cover and refrigerate for at least 3 hours to combine the flavors.

Tip: Cover and refrigerate for up to 1 week.

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intuitively assess variables, size up a situation, and make a decision. To us, their choices may at times seem mystifying, but their methods eliminate a lot of angst.

❖ **Kids prioritize happiness and chase joy.** As parents, we can't divorce our decision-making from the realities of our lives. Our choices need to make financial and logistical sense. But as we mull over ideas, we can take a page from our children. We can at least ask that one simple questions our kids ask themselves: what will make us happy?

❖ **Kids roll with change.** Fifth-grade students know the next step is middle school, much as eighth graders know they are headed to high school. They don't have an alternative. In reality, despite our instinct to exert control, we often don't have options either. We may as well accept change gracefully. Related, when we do have a choice but fear holds us back, we can think like a child. We can conceptualize that next step as inexorable and simply embrace it.

❖ **Kids take themselves wherever they go.** In other words, children are consistently the same person across settings. Like kids, we ultimately are more comfortable when we present our authentic selves (within reason) to friends and colleagues. When we routinely are honest, genuine, and open, we are more likely to develop

meaningful new relationships and make fulfilling career choices.

❖ **Kids don't care whether the water is cold.** If there is a swimming pool, they are going to jump in. Children are more inclined to just throw themselves into something new. For all sorts of rational and logical reasons, we often ignore our gut. We listen to our head more than our heart. However, it can be good for the spirit to take a flying leap into the unknown.

Summary

As my son talks to me about starting high school in the fall, I feel his anticipation, his readiness. I watch him gather information, make decisions, and take ownership. My parenting role today is very different than it was back in that hallway, when I held his hand and cried because he was graduating from preschool.

The feelings, however, are similar. When I meet with parents, that familiar mix of optimism, sentimentality, pride, and protectiveness rises straight to the surface. I don't think it ever gets easier to manage uncertainty, to close chapters in either our children's lives or our own. But like our kids, we can rely on one deceptively simple coping skill: We can just do what's next. ■

Phyllis L. Fagell is a licensed clinical professional counselor, certified professional school counselor, journalist and author of "Middle School Matters" (DeCapo Press, forthcoming, 2019).