

CHALLENGES AND TRANSITIONS TO NEW SITUATIONS

1.1 PLACEMENT

TRANSCRIPT OF KEY TRANSITIONS AUDIO

Adoption specialist, Beth Neil and adoptive parent, Deb talk about dealing with key transitions including placement and moving to secondary school with an adopted child.

[Intro Music]

Beth Neil

When things change in an adopted child's life, sometimes they're more sensitive than other children.

Deb

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Beth Neil

My name is Beth Neil I'm a senior lecturer in social work at University of East Anglia in Norwich. Well, obviously the first and most important transition is the move to the adoptive family. Often at the point a child is moving in with their adoptive family the person they are probably most attached to is their foster carers. So I think it's really important at this stage for adoptive parents and foster carers to work closely together over that transition to make it as easy as possible for the child, and from the adoptive parent point of view it's important to respect actually how difficult it might be for the child to move, to try and be not too defensive if the child is crying for their foster mum, or calling their foster mum mummy or saying they want to go home. These things are normal and natural for a child and it's important not to freak out about this, but just to reassure your child. You know, some children might need to have a little bit of contact with their foster carers after they've moved in with their adoptive parent, so they know their foster carer is still there, still thinks about them, that they're allowed to have those feelings. It's an important message for a child to learn in life, that people still love you when you move on.

[Music]

Deb

I'm Deb and my husband and I adopted 2 little girls 10 years ago when they were 3 and 5. Our transitions are always difficult, however small. Even leaving the house in the morning can be a real challenge. It's almost like they're locked in a ... you know they're secure almost, they've found a way of feeling a little bit secure just for that moment, and they know what's got to happen, and they know that they've got to change, but it's just really difficult for them to make that transition, even if it's just

putting their shoes on or getting their bag packed, or, you know, sorting yourself out. It's really really hard, you can see.

Beth Neil

When things change in an adopted child's life, sometimes they're more sensitive than other children to changes, transitions, losses. You know a pet dying or a grandparent dying, it's difficult for any child, but an adopted child might be more sensitive to these transitions. So I think it's about understanding and tuning in to children's vulnerability and maybe recognising that children might need additional reassurance, they might become more clingy to you or they might become angry with you. Again I think it's really important to try and step back from how that affects you personally. Obviously it will affect you personally, but if you can understand why your child is doing it, it's easier to find ways of dealing with it. At times when your child pushes you away, you have to stay in there, stick with them, keep reassuring them, say 'well, you know, I don't care if you say you hate me, because I love you and I'm your mum and you're not going anywhere' it's that kind of strategy that I think is helpful.

[Music]

Deb

One of the bigger ones is the secondary school transfer. Once they've made it, it seems to be the train's back on the track and they're OK. The small ones are kind of manageable but, I mean schools mostly these days are very good, very supportive, also with the hormonal changes too. Looking back I think it was all really about the loss of control, the bigger environment transferring to secondary school, the more unstructured times, the changing from subject to subject and room to room, having to get on with more people, peer relationships, just bigger everything. It's almost like the problems they had in primary, but on a bigger scale, triggered a lot of anxiety in my daughter. So that manifests itself in big tantrums at home, she mostly acted out at home and that's how I knew her anxiety was really sort of at 90%. But luckily the school believed me, because it's hard when her behaviour was good at school but she was acting out at home.

[Music]

Beth Neil

I think it's really important for an adoptive parent to have a lot of support networks for themselves. I think just bringing up any child is tough, but adopted children often do have special needs. You're going to need your friends, your family. It's important for the adopted kids we talk to, how much they value their relationships with their grandparents, their aunts, their uncles, to feel part of the whole adoptive family. So it's important, you know, to nurture your own support networks and you draw on all your resources and you don't feel 'I've just got to do it all myself'. Nobody can do it all themselves.

[Outro Music]