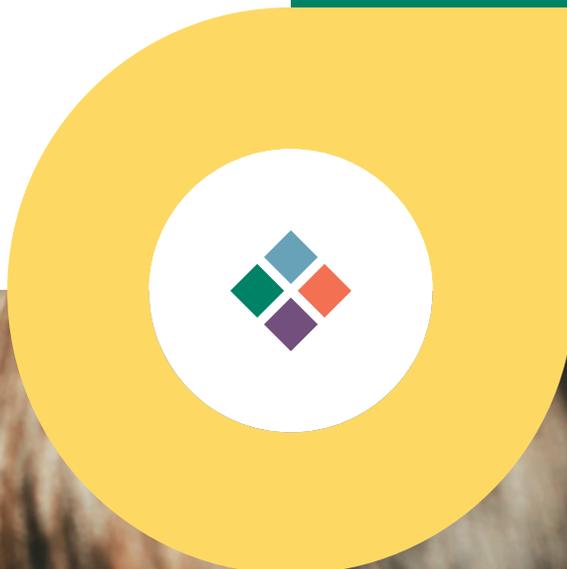


EARLY CHILDHOOD TRANSITIONS

A guide to supporting big and small changes for Wyoming families



Wyoming Early Childhood
Coalition Network



HELLO WYOMING FAMILIES!

Transitions are changes you experience in the world around you. You will experience big transitions throughout your life as well as many small, everyday transitions. With each transition, you have the ability to internally adjust to the change. When young children go through transitions, they respond emotionally, and these responses are reflected in their behaviors.

Think about the Domains of Development and how your children are growing, learning, and processing the world around them in different ways. Children's reactions to transitions and the strategies they use to cope during a change are often related to their developmental stage.

THE DOMAINS OF DEVELOPMENT:



COMMUNICATION

Language & Literacy



SENSE OF SELF & RELATIONSHIPS

Social & Emotional Health



CURIOS MINDS

Cognition, Knowledge,
Approaches to Learning



STRONG & HEALTHY BODIES

Physical Development,
Health, Motor Skills

All of children's transitions also involve their families, and because children are unique, each family experiences transitions in their own way. As an adult, you play an important role in supporting young children through their transitions, helping them to feel safe, secure, and confident during different situations.

The purpose of this guide is to help you recognize the transitions your children experience every day, as well as the bigger transitions that are coming up in your lives, and to show you some best practices for making various transitions become smooth experiences for your family.

This guide to the Domains of Development was produced in collaboration between:



EARLY CHILDHOOD TRANSITIONS

An Overview

Transition means to change, and there are a lot of changes that happen in a child's life. From everyday transitions like going to bed at the end of the day to more disruptive transitions like welcoming home a new sibling or starting school, young children are constantly faced with change—and they have big feelings about it.

Children experience a lot of feelings as they anticipate or react to change. Every child experiences change differently, and they show this in their individual behaviors. While one child may transition smoothly in a particular situation, another may need more time to get used to it. And that's OK!

Adults play an important role in supporting young children through transition. Here are four basic ways to support positive transitions at home, in child care, at school, and in everyday life that will help your child feel secure and comfortable as they move through change.

1 Make Connections

Showing children that there are similarities between new experiences and how things used to be, or similarities between what happens at home and within a new setting, will help them feel more comfortable.

2 Communicate

Whenever possible, talk with children about changes that are coming up and let them know what to expect. Keep talking while transitions are happening, too, and encourage your kids to tell you how they are feeling.

3 Give Them Some Control

It's important for children to feel a sense of control and a sense of belonging in a new situation. What decisions can you let them make during a new transition? How can you include them in a new process or activity?

4 Keep a Positive Attitude

Your attitude and the way you react as your children experience change are more important than you may know. Your children look to you for guidance. Do your best to stay positive and encouraging, even when it's hard!



Taking Baby to Child Care for the First Time

Taking your little one to child care can be a difficult decision and an emotional experience. Here are a few ways to ease the transition—for both of you—from being at home together to being apart for the first time.



For You:

Know that you have a choice

- Visit the centers or home care establishments you are interested in to get a feel for the environment, the staff, the procedures, and their standards.
- Ask about what they do for babies transitioning into their care.
- Take your baby with you when you visit so they can begin to feel comfortable in a new environment.
- Make a decision based on what you feel is best for your family.

Pack your baby's bag the night before to avoid the anxiety of being in a hurry

- Be sure to include something that will give your baby a sense of security, like a favorite stuffed animal, toy, or blanket.

Start a relationship with your care provider and communicate openly

- Your care provider can tell you a lot about your baby's behavior and development.
- You can tell your care provider important information about your baby.
- When you work together, your baby will receive the attention and care they need.



For Your Baby:

Prepare for the change

- Even though they're little, babies can feel anxious, especially when there's a change in their routine.
- Talk to your baby about what you're doing when you're packing their bag, show them that you're packing one of their favorite things, and describe where they will be going and what they will be doing there.

Be engaged during drop-off

- Giving your baby your full attention will make them feel special and less like they are being left behind.

Don't delay the goodbye

- Try to limit drop-off time so your baby doesn't think you're staying all day, and so they can begin to find their own place in the new environment.
- Make sure your baby sees you leave so they're not confused when you're not there.

Be engaged during pickup

- Give a big smile and a big hug!
- Your baby has been away from you for what feels like a long time; giving them attention right away will let your baby know you are back and reinforce that you will always come back.

EARLY EDUCATION ENDAVORS

Moving into an Early Education Environment

Whether your child is entering from a child care setting or coming from home, you can help them smoothly transition into their next early learning experience.

Talk about the change

- You can mentally prepare your child by talking about going to school, reading books together about going to school, and having them talk to friends and family members who go to school.

Practice meeting new challenges

- Your child will need to use their everyday skills to meet new challenges and expectations, such as taking off their coat, pulling up their pants, and putting on their shoes.
- Even though a teacher will be there to help, practicing at home will help your child feel confident and comfortable when they are met with these expectations.

Visit the school and meet the teachers

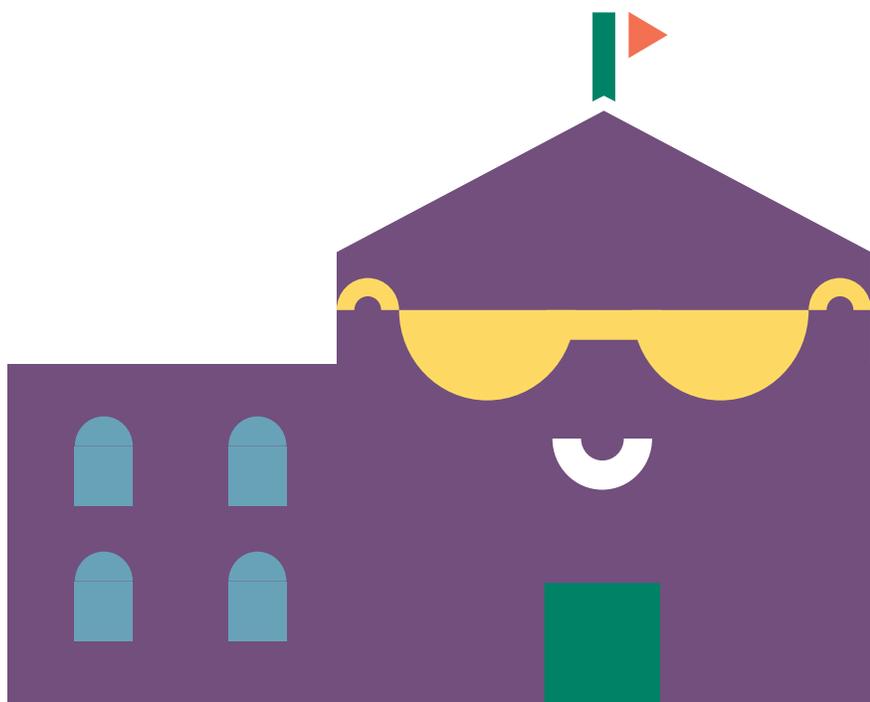
- Give your child an opportunity to see what their new environment is going to look and feel like, and to get to know who is going to be there.
- This also gives you the opportunity to start an ongoing, communicative relationship with your child's teacher.

Establish school day routines

- This may include picking out what clothes to wear the night before and packing a backpack, listening to the same song each day on the way to drop-off, or using words and phrases to say “goodbye” and “hello” that are special just between you.
- Routines are reassuring; they create comfortability and can help transitions go more smoothly.

Be confident and instill confidence

- This can be a big transition for adults, but when you help your child prepare for the change, and when you confidently tell them they are going to do great, they will believe you—you should believe you, too.



Entering Kindergarten

The transition to kindergarten is very exciting. For children, it's an opportunity to learn new things, master new skills, and build new relationships. But this transition can also be a time of uncertainty about the unknown, as routines, environments, and people change. This can be a major transition for families, too, as their routines change and parents realize their children are quickly growing up! Here are some things you can do to prepare.

SCHOOL
IS COOL

Before school starts

- Visit the school and meet the teachers. Help your child find their classroom, where they will sit, where the bathroom is, and walk around the playground.
- Let the school know if your child has allergies or special needs.
- Start your school day bedtime and wake up routine early to give your child time to adjust.
- Read books together about starting school and talk about the characters' experiences.

Tip!

Tell your child how excited you are for them to start school, and listen to any thoughts or concerns they may have.

On the first day of school

- Be positive! Let your child know you're proud of them for starting something new.
- Smile, hug, and say goodbye in a way that reassures your child you will see them later.

During the first week of school

- Know that the adjustment to school may take some time and support your child by talking about it.
- Ask questions about why they think school is fun and what they think is hard about school.
- Instill self-confidence by celebrating your child's successes, like how they tried to print their name or that they sat quietly during story time.
- Check your child's backpack! They will bring home information on routines, meetings, important dates, and more.

Throughout the year

- Talk with your child's teacher regularly to find out how they're doing, academically and behaviorally, and attend any parent-teacher meetings you can.
- Enjoy having a kindergartener! This is a big milestone for the whole family.

PRACTICE & PREPARE

Everyday Transitions

Everyday transitions occur when children move from one activity to another, including the move from dinner to playtime, going out of the house to the park or the library and then coming home again, getting dropped off or picked up from a child care or educational setting, going from bath time to bedtime, and so many more.

For some children, transitions throughout the day can be frustrating or may lead to anxiety. And transitions may be even more difficult if children are tired, hungry, or confused. Here are some best practices to keep in mind that will help your family navigate through everyday transitions.

Establish routines

Stable routines allow young children to anticipate what's going to happen next, giving them confidence and a sense of self-control.

Routine habits can guide daily transitions like a change in activity or from playtime to bedtime. Some parents use a timer or give a five-minute warning, while others use a book, a song, or another special ritual to signal that a change is coming.

Make it a game

Create a song and dance or engage in pretend play about what you're going to do next: superheroes can fly to the sink to brush their teeth; new world records can be set for finding shoes the fastest or putting toys away quickest.

It's helpful to allow enough time for transitions to take place, avoiding the anxiety of being in a hurry.

Talk it out

It can be easier for children to get through a transition if they can talk about it. Help your kids learn a variety of emotion words and encourage them to express what they're feeling by asking leading questions about why they may be sad or frustrated. And then, even if they don't have the words to answer your questions, let them know you understand how they're feeling and explain the "why" of the transition (leaving the park, for example, to go home for dinner).

Use "first ... then" statements to help your children know what's going on and what's coming up next. Knowing what's coming can provide some comfortability in the change.

Put yourself in their shoes.

Transitions are difficult, and they can be hard on parents, too. Do your best to stay warm and supportive. Try to remember that your little people are still learning—about their world and about themselves! Everyone has a hard time managing their emotions sometimes, especially when you're still trying to figure out what emotions even are.



Transitioning & Adapting to Digital Learning

Families of young children have had to face a lot of changes as traditional school and learning situations have transitioned to online settings. The first thing you should know while your children are learning from home is that you are already doing things right!

DIGITAL DYNAMIC

Respond to Curiosity

Join your child in their curiosity. Help them relate their discovery to prior knowledge, ask open-ended questions, and help your child find answers to their questions.

Have Conversations

Be a good listener, use interesting, rich language and full sentences, and talk about topics that are interesting to your child.

Encourage Imaginative Play

Play is essential for building creative and flexible minds, solving problems, practicing self-regulation, and strengthening relationships. These are the foundations for success in school and in life. The learning that happens during play is especially meaningful to children because they have shaped it themselves.

Solve Problems Together

Allow children to be part of brainstorming solutions to everyday problems, such as reaching an object high on a shelf or fixing the torn page in a book.

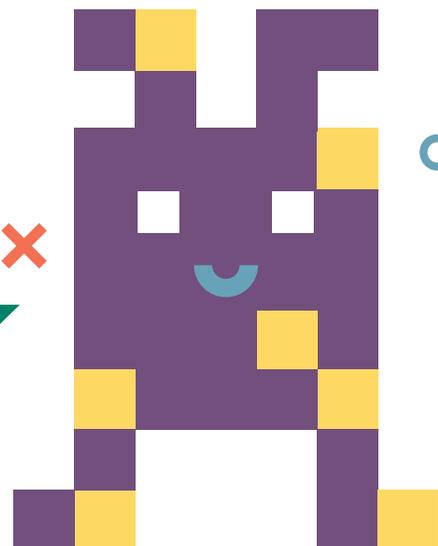
Ask Questions

Good question starters are open-ended. Start with leading questions like these and then ask follow up questions when you have listened to your child's answers.

- How did you figure that out?
- What does that remind you of?
- What did you notice?
- What part of the story was your favorite?
- Why do you think that happened?

Reminder!

The foundation for all learning is caring and supportive relationships in an environment that is safe, predictable, and nurturing, and home provides each of these. You can build on this foundation by interacting with your kids, paying attention to what they're learning, and encouraging them to play.



QUALITY CHILD CARE:

What to Look For

There is a lot to think about when choosing a child care or early educational environment for your child, and that's because it's an important decision! Thinking about quality of care will help you narrow down your choices. Consider this checklist of quality characteristics.

1 First, here are some questions you can ask at the facilities you are interested in:

- Are you licensed?
- What are the qualifications of your staff? Are they trained in First Aid and CPR?
- What is the group size and ratio of children to adults?
- What activities are available for my child's age group?
- How can I be involved?
- What will my child's day look like? Is there a regular routine?

2 Then, look and listen for these important elements:

- Learning groups are small enough to allow children frequent opportunities to interact with adults and with each other.
- Family involvement is welcome and encouraged.
- The staff is educated, experienced, and knowledgeable.
- The adults provide sensitive, caring relationships to the children and have positive interactions.
- The program maintains high standards of health, safety, and nutrition.
- Both the indoor and outdoor environments are clean and free of safety hazards.
- There are clear and accessible administrative policies and procedures.
- Each child's developmental needs and interests are considered.
- The program curriculum includes opportunities for children to develop in every domain of their development.



How To Serve & Return

“Serve and return” is about the everyday, back and forth interactions between you and your child. It’s the practice of noticing and responding to your child’s cues with eye contact, words, a hug, or other easy actions that show your child you hear them and see them, which in turn lets them know they are important.

Notice the Serve

- Is your child looking or pointing at something? Making a sound or facial expression? That’s a serve. The key is to pay attention to what your child is focused on. You can’t spend all your time doing this, so look for small opportunities throughout the day—like while you’re getting them dressed or waiting in line at the store.
- By noticing serves, you’ll learn a lot about your child’s abilities, interests, and needs.

Return the Serve

- You can offer comfort with a hug and gentle words, help your child and play with them, or simply acknowledge them with a sound or facial expression, a smile or a nod. Or, pick up an object your child is pointing to and bring it closer.
- Your support rewards your child’s interests and curiosity. When you return a serve, children know that their thoughts and feelings are heard and understood.

Give it a Name

- When you return a serve by naming what a child is seeing, doing, or feeling, you make important language connections in their brain, even before they can talk or understand your words. You can name anything—a person, a thing, an action, a feeling, or a combination.
- When you name what children are focused on, you help them understand the world around them and know what to expect.

BACK AND FORTH

Take Turns

- Every time you return a serve, give your child a chance to respond. Children need time to form their responses, especially when they’re learning so many things at once, so waiting is crucial.
- Taking turns helps children learn self-control and how to get along with others. By waiting, you give children time to develop their own ideas and build their confidence and independence.

Practice Transitions

- Children signal when they’re done or ready to move on to a new activity. They might let go of a toy, pick up a new one, or turn to look at something else. Or they may walk away, start to fuss, or say, “All done!”
- When you can find moments for children to take the lead through a transition, you support them in exploring their world and give them confidence to do so at their own pace.

Good to Know!

Responding to your child’s “serves” also builds neural connections and strengthens your child’s brain, which supports their development.

Content adapted from the Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University

DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING & INTERVENTION RESOURCES

90% of your child's brain will have developed before their fifth birthday. That's why it's essential for all children ages birth through five to have developmental screenings.

Early childhood developmental screenings are free in Wyoming! Find the child development service center nearest you at screenforsuccess.org.

For early intervention resources, go to:

- Council for Exceptional Children
- Federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)
- Parent Information Center
- UPLIFT – Services for children, youth, and families
- WIC Works Resource System
- Wyoming Department of Education
- Wyoming Early Childhood Network
- Wyoming Early Hearing Detection & Intervention (EHDI)
- Wyoming Institute for Disabilities
- Zero to Three – Infant/toddler resources

- Screenings address both specific and general developmental areas, such as specific disorders like autism, specific areas like cognitive development, language, social-emotional development, and gross and fine motor skills, as well as more general, overall health and development.
- Regular screenings help you understand your child's development, making it easier to celebrate milestones and identify potential development concerns as early as possible.
- Identifying delays early on allows experts to create individualized plans and perform the appropriate interventions that will improve the ability to thrive.



BIRTH THROUGH 2 YEARS

Your child is learning and changing all the time. Here are some skills and abilities you can look for as they grow! Remember, every child is different and will reach milestones at their own pace.

Birth — 3 months

- While lying on their tummy, pushes up on arms, lifts and holds head up
- Visually tracks a moving toy from side to side, reaches for a toy
- Quiets, smiles, or turns head towards a familiar voice, and makes eye contact
- Coos and enjoys a variety of movement

3 — 6 months

- Rolls over from front to back
- Begins to babble, gurgle, and make other noises to communicate
- Laughs out loud and kicks legs to show joy
- While lying on their back, grabs for and plays with their toes

6 — 9 months

- Sits up on their own
- Imitates sounds you make such as blowing raspberries
- Enjoys games like peek-a-boo and comes to understand object permanence
- Uses gestures such as pointing, shaking their head, and nodding to communicate

9 — 12 months

- Says “mama” and “dada,” responds to their name, “no,” “stop,” and simple directions
- Loves to do the same things and play the same games over and over again
- Eats a variety of different foods using their fingers
- Crawls and pulls up to stand on their own

1 year

- Makes a connection between words you say and pictures in a book
- Shows affection to familiar people and cries when you leave the room
- Takes their first steps on their own
- Precisely picks up objects with thumb and forefinger
- Shows a reaction to familiar songs and stories and laughs at funny things

2 years

- Uses two- to four-word sentences
- Dances, helps to get dressed and undressed, and begins to run
- Scribbles with crayons and builds towers four objects high
- Begins to engage in make-believe play
- Imitates the behavior of others, especially adults and older kids



Developmental Milestones

3 YEARS THROUGH 5 YEARS

Your child is learning and changing all the time. Here are some skills and abilities you can look for as they grow! Remember, every child is different and will reach milestones at their own pace.

3 years

- Has conversations using two- to three-sentences at a time
- Names their friends, common objects, and says their first name and age
- Climbs and runs well, jumps and may hop on one foot
- Walks up and down stairs using one foot on each step
- Likes to help with tasks around the house
- Openly shows affection and displays a wide range of feelings
- Makes up stories and takes turns playing with others
- Turns pages in a book one at a time

4 years

- Moves forward and backward with agility
- Uses scissors, draws a person with two to four body parts, and draws circles and squares
- Speaks clearly enough for strangers to understand using sentences of five to six words
- Understands the concept of counting and may count to 20
- Negotiates solutions to conflicts
- Sorts things by attributes such as size, shape, and color
- Understands pictures and symbols stand for real things
- Makes up silly songs, goofy words, and starts rhyming

5 years

- Swings, climbs, hops, somersaults, and may skip
- Prints some letters and draws triangles and other geometric patterns
- Better understands the concept of time
- Uses future tense, tells longer stories, and recalls parts of a story
- Wants to please friends and be like their friends
- Likes to sing, dance, act, and dress up
- Can carry on a meaningful conversation with another person
- Knows their address and phone number



**Find additional activities and resources
to help support and encourage your
kids' development:**



Screen for Success
screenforsuccess.org



WY Quality Counts
wyqualitycounts.org



Head Start
eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov



2-1-1
wy211.communityos.org



**Wyoming Department
of Family Services**
[dfs.wyo.gov/services/
family-services/child-care](http://dfs.wyo.gov/services/family-services/child-care)



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