

## Life's Difficult Changes

### Growing Up Brings Many Changes

As children grow, they face many changes. Some are normal biological or physical changes in development, such as the "terrible twos," losing a tooth, fear of the dark, menstruation and puberty.

Other changes are imposed on children: the death of a friend or relative, moving to a new home or school, enduring a physical illness or injury, and divorce. Children need a consistent, nurturing and caring environment to successfully negotiate these changes and challenges.

### The Normal Developmental Stages

Most parents have a good understanding of what constitutes normal child development. They know that bed-wetting is not serious at age 2 but can be at age 13. Temper tantrums that are tolerated in a toddler are unacceptable in an older child.

Becoming a parent is a developmental change of its own. Especially for first-time parents, there are many challenges, worries and fears, with too few guideposts.

Emotional problems are a normal and healthy part of a child's development. Dealing with these problems can be an opportunity for parents to learn about themselves and their children.

All children do not respond alike, even in similar situations, so parents with more than one child might be in for surprises. Parents must make adjustments in their responses to each child's individual temperament and personality.

Books, magazines, tapes, courses and support groups are available for guidance. We recommend that you use them, as well as your own parents, relatives and family doctor.

### As Parents Struggle, So Do Children

Adults face economic, social, emotional, spiritual and physical stressors.

Divorce is one example of a common contemporary stress. It is often a long process; there can be months or even years of anguish before and after the actual decree. Often the actual divorce is not the problem; it is the disruption of routine and relationships that cause stress.

While adults suffer from loneliness, guilt or anger, they might not have the energy or resources to respond to their child's needs. It is usually during this time, though, that their child needs them most.

### Symptoms of Transitional Difficulty

#### *In Parents*

- Abusing alcohol or other drugs
- Sleeping disturbances
- Abusive behavior
- Rigid behavior; using old ways to solve problems, even when they don't work
- Becoming accident-prone
- Overeating



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- Withdrawing from others

#### *In Children*

- Nightmares
- Regressive behavior
- Talk of worthlessness
- Hyperactivity directed at adults
- Indiscriminate attachments
- Increases in fears and worries
- Irritability
- Erratic shifts in mood

#### **Advice That Has Worked for Generations**

Both parents and children need buffers from the stress caused by change. The best buffer is talking with someone who understands what you are experiencing.

Children need more. They want consistency, safety and predictability in their environment. They want to be with adults who understand their world.

Society has developed many rituals to reinforce feelings of consistency and safety. These rituals can help families and individuals through transitions and prepare for upcoming change. For example:

- Birthday parties celebrate new life stages and age demands.
- Confirmations and bar mitzvahs signify adulthood and new responsibilities.
- Proms, entrance exams and graduations are teenage milestones that mark transition.
- Funerals help us cope with death and grief.

Rituals help us gain perspective. As our children encounter new challenges, we need to help them understand what lies ahead.

The important thing to remember is that challenges have a positive side. By working through them with your child, you develop a "language" and experience base for dealing with new emotions and life events.

If a problem is new for you, too, it helps for your children to see you turning to other resources for help—friends, relatives, books, professionals or support groups. You teach important life skills and demonstrate how to reach out for support and solve problems.

#### **Additional Coping Guidelines**

##### *For Yourself*

- Accept yourself.
- Eat and sleep well.
- Don't dwell on the past—let go of anger and hurt.
- Break big goals into small ones.
- Nurture your relationships with your spouse or other adults. Create a weekly parent's night out.
- Take time to relax.
- Spend time with people you like.
- Don't over-worry about your children.
- Exercise.
- Do something nice for someone else.

*For Your Children*

- Show them options.
- Make sure they eat and sleep well.
- Explain in words they can understand.
- Acknowledge their feelings.
- Supervise television choices.
- Don't talk about problems that are above their level of understanding.
- Set boundaries; make clear what is acceptable behavior.
- Allow them to make their own decisions within an acceptable range of options.
- Do something you and your child both enjoy.

**If You Are At a Loss, Ask for Help**

If the normal pressures and difficulties of life get out of hand and you run out of ways to deal with them, you can get help from a professional.

The experts at Bradley are devoted to healing the hearts and minds of children and their families. Sometimes just a little help can prevent short-term problems from becoming more serious ones.

**Call Bradley anytime: 401-432-1000.**