

Transitions are stressful for many children, teenagers and adults, *even* when the transition is healthy and desirable.

Transition means change and requires leaving something or someplace familiar, *even* if that place was difficult and/or painful.

Transitions can be *particularly* difficult for individuals with learning disabilities.

Changing schools or moving to a new level within the same school can be especially hard for the child or adolescent and family.

There are many reasons for this difficulty with transition. First, it may be difficult for an individual with learning disabilities to apply or to generalize what he or she has learned in one situation to a new situation. Further, the individual may have *finally* become comfortable with the social and physical environment in the familiar place or school, after much discomfort, energy and time. He or she must once again spend a great deal of time and effort to gain a level of comfort. To complicate matters, the child or adolescent likely isn't sure that he or she will feel comfortable again.

A major reason for difficulty with transitions may be the child or adolescent's past negative social experiences, for example being teased, bullied or ignored.

As a result, the child or adolescent may *expect* to have painful experiences in the new setting.

Therefore, the upcoming transition may trigger old fears and anxieties.

Entering high school can be especially painful for the youth and his or her parents. Adolescence is a time of growing independence and great physical, cognitive and emotional growth. It is also a time therefore when the effect of an individual's learning disabilities and limitations may become more apparent, especially in comparison to other teenagers. Thus, it can be a time of more sadness and frustration for both youth and parents. The teenager may desperately want to *get rid of* the learning disability, to be *normal*, and to no longer go for special help.

What can parents do to minimize their child's anxiety and discomfort with such transitions?

First, it is important to validate the child or teenager's fears. Comments meant to reassure, for example, "it will work out," don't reassure the child or youth. Rather, he or she might feel that nobody understands, which will only make the problem feel worse. A more helpful comment might be, "It is hard for most people to make a change. I know it might be extra hard for you. Let's talk about what makes it hard and what we can do to help you with the change."

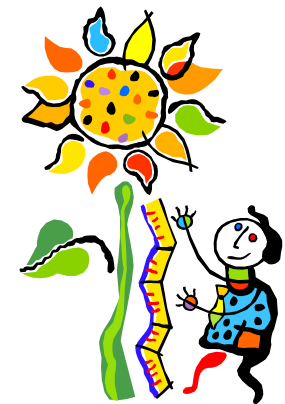
Once they have validated their son or daughter's fears and concerns, parents can help find ways to promote an easier and more successful transition for their son or daughter. For example, it may be helpful for parents to get to know the staff of the new setting, and to

find possible supports for the child or adolescent in this new setting. It might also be helpful if the child or adolescent visits the setting and meets staff. Parents and youth can identify what has helped the child or adolescent to make changes in the past. For example, for some children or adolescents time to adjust may have been enough. Asking the child or adolescent what has helped can involve him or her in finding solutions.

No matter what the youth's chronological age, it is important to accommodate his or her needs and to determine realistic expectations for the *particular individual*.

It is important for parents and youth to plan for and to deal with various relevant issues, for example, travel to and from school, amount of time allotted to do homework as well as identifying work that requires help from parents or tutors.

Despite the difficulty involved, transitions represent an opportunity for growth.





Integra, founded in 1967 by parents and professionals, is an accredited Children's Mental Health Centre dedicated to helping children and adolescents who experience social, emotional and behavioural problems related to their learning disabilities. We are a charitable organization administered by a Board of Directors comprised of dedicated volunteers from the community.

Integra has an experienced and multidisciplinary professional staff that is dedicated to creating and implementing a range of programs. Integra serves as a centre for research, practicum placement and continuing education.

Integra is committed to the promotion of a community-wide understanding of the mental health needs of children and adolescents who have learning disabilities, and to improving community-based services for them and their families. A range of clinical services is provided by Integra, as well as related activities in research and evaluation, and in training, consultation, collaboration and advocacy.



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TIPS FOR PARENTS

The Trouble With Transitions

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