Taking the Scary out of Transitions

Adapted from Krystyann Krywko

My son passed his Universal Newborn Hearing Screening at birth. Three years later he was diagnosed with moderate to severe hearing loss. Like so many other families, I had no idea what to expect or what to do. I had concerns about my son's lack of speech and had asked our paediatrician for pretty close to a year if she thought he might be delayed. She told me to stop worrying - he was a boy and a second child. He was just on his own path. I didn't need to worry.

Just before his third birthday, his playschool teacher suggested that maybe it was time to take him for a hearing test. We had been talking about his speech over the course of the year, and the past few weeks, due to a bad cold, it seemed like he wasn't hearing anything. We took him to an ENT, where his hearing test results were "abysmal." We were told he had fluid in his ears, so tubes were put in and two weeks later we were to go back for further tests. But, while his hearing improved a little once the fluid was gone, we were told he would need to wear hearing aids to access what hearing he did have. We were stunned, and excited, and overwhelmed, and unsure, and about a million other emotions all at the same time.

We were fortunate, we found the resources and support we needed, and we are good now. Today, at the age of eight, he is an energetic and athletic child, who loves to read Harry Potter books and play hockey. The sky is the limit and he is in no way defined solely by his hearing loss.

Here are some tips I've gathered to take the "scary" out of the times of transition:

Transitions seem magnified when you have a child who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing. While transitions can be good or bad, planned or unexpected, in all

cases as parents we are shifted out of our comfort zone and we must re-examine how we fit into the new situation.

The word "transition" often becomes intertwined with anxiety as your child moves through the education system and out into the world. There is so much to think about. Will support remain the same? What will happen if we change schools or move to a different city? How will my child adjust to middle school? Our district has a new speech-language pathologist, will she understand my son? Just when it seems you have things set up the way you like, along comes a change.

What if there was a way to make transitions less about being scary and more about recognizing a growth opportunity?

Prepare yourself

One of the reasons transitions are so scary is that we are afraid of the unknown. So, make the unknown, known. Stand back and take a moment to acknowledge your worry and how you are feeling. Then, when you are ready, figure out what it is you need to do to prepare yourself for the transition. Read books, ask questions, join a support group, spend time walking around your new neighbourhood, find real information (engaging in gossip and rumours doesn't help.) Do whatever it is you need to do to get your questions and concerns answered.

Prepare/involve your child

As a parent of a child with additional needs, it is easy to become engrossed in advocating for their needs and forgetting to include them in the process. Of course, how much you involve your child depends on their age, but even the youngest child can be involved in transitions. After all, they are the ones most directly involved. Some ways in which you can do this are:

- Have your child visit the new school.
- Meet teachers/new team before the beginning of the school year.

- Have your child either write down or tell you what they think their needs are.
- Attend IPP or team meetings.

Nothing is written in stone

Despite your best intentions sometimes things do not work out the way you planned. Maybe moving your child from individual speech therapy to group sessions was a move backwards for their confidence, or the support services at the college your child chose to attend are not working out as promised. This is where preparing yourself comes into play, no matter what your decision was - there is always an alternative way.

Give it time

The world today is a place of instant gratification - on-demand movies and same day shipping are the norm. But, change takes time to adjust to and it is important that you give both yourself and your child the time needed to adjust to the change. It is unrealistic to walk into a new school, or to adjust to a new therapy schedule in the first week or two. Try to be patient and see how your child grows into the change.

Develop a support network

"Change is the only constant in life," said the Greek philosopher Heraclitus; so you might as well get used to it. Transitioning is one part of this journey that is called parenthood. So, find a group (or groups) that you can tag along for a ride with. There is often someone out there who has gone through the very same situation that you are facing. Post a question to the Alberta Hands & Voices Facebook group. Look for someone in your community that has experienced a similar situation. Ask your child's audiologist or speech-language pathologist if they know a family that you can connect with. Find an organization that you can connect with. There is strength in numbers, and if you can enter a transition with others at your side it takes a whole lot of scary out of the change!