

## TRANSITIONS

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Whether you colored Easter eggs, went to church, got an Easter basket or wondered why only Christian children got them, put on new clothes, read about the "Easter Bunny", saw the movie *Easter Parade*, or saw the day "Easter" marked on the calendar, we all knew that sometime in April there will be many mentions of Easter. Easter is about many things, and the meanings vary from culture to culture and religion to religion, but the basic story of Easter is *transition*. It's about life to death; and death to life; old to new; known to mystery. It's about moving from something old and familiar to something new and undiscovered. What are known as "Spring breaks" are scheduled close to Easter, when students transition, briefly, from the discipline of school and learning, to a few days or weeks of "cutting loose".

All children in care are more familiar with transitions than they should be, and Easter – regardless of one's faith or how it is acknowledged – is a good time for people caring for children and teens to use the occasion and symbols to talk about transitions with our kids. They've already had many, and they will have many more. Transitions can be daunting, but they don't have to be feared. Talking openly about the transitions our young people have already experienced is a good way to help remove or reduce the fear.

The transition that causes the most anxiety for the most people is death, and we should not avoid talking about it with our children and youth. Although some people talk about death with great conviction and certainty (you'd think they were there yesterday), the truth is that the only people who *know* about death are dead people! This fact is why so many feel the need to reduce their anxiety by claiming to know all about it – from those who can describe "heaven" and "hell" with great clarity, to those who cope with the anxiety by deciding there is no such thing as "heaven" or "hell", or even anything beyond death. Sitting down with the kids

and asking them all the different things they've heard about death and the afterlife lets them know that transitions involve a lot of uncertainty and anxiety, and that's why different people "believe" different things. It is important for kids to know that transitions are challenging for everyone, not just kids. Not knowing what's next causes us to decide certain things in advance to give us more security.

Many of our kids have experienced death in their families. Now is a good time to let them talk about it. Many references to Easter contain references to "tombs" and graves. These are part of life and adults need to guide kids into ways to think about and talk about the losses caused by death. Many of our kids have been moved many times, often not knowing what was coming next or even where they were going. Now is a good time to let them talk about it. I have never believed that heaven was a "place", but rather a relationship. Many couples say things to each other like "my place is with you". We often hear people talking about death by saying they are "going home", returning to the Creator or the "Great Spirit". Unhappily, this notion of "going home" is very complicated for our kids. They need to be able to talk about it, and they only have us to initiate the discussion.

Talking with the kids about transitions allows us to introduce the notion of "perspective", and deciding how we are going to "look at" our situation. It's true that we never know for sure what's coming next, so it's a good idea to make the most of where we are and what we have now. Always waiting for what is next robs us of the opportunity to enjoy what is available to us today. This doesn't mean we shouldn't have complaints, or that we shouldn't look forward to better times in the future. Perspective allows us to do all three: know that everything may not be perfect now, but that there are some good things; know that there is always a chance that there will be better times ahead; and remember that we can't count on the future but we can count our "blessings" now. Learning to do this when we are young will help us to have a much more satisfying life as an adult.

Living through every transition makes us stronger and more wise. Talk with the kids about what they've learned by having had so many transitions in their lives already, help them acknowledge the strength that has them still plugging away, even if they are resentful and angry. Help them realize the wisdom they've acquired about life, about other people, and about themselves. Reassure them that this strength and these lessons will serve them well in their future.

Put up some bunny's ; color some eggs; hide some baskets; talk about chickens and eggs; watch for and acknowledge new life as Spring begins to spring; and plant some hope for better times ahead while enjoying some good times right now.

*This article was published in the CYC Advocate in April, 2017*