

# Adapting to change can be difficult for some children

Does your child have trouble shifting from one activity to another? Does he lose it when you bring home a burger when he was expecting pizza? While it may seem that he is stubborn and deliberately trying to make your life miserable, he may in fact be temperamentally slow-to-adapt.

One of the nine temperament traits is adaptability. When a person is slow-to-adapt, any change (transition) or surprise can trigger a stress reaction. Some of the most common transitions are:

- Intrusions — such as scooping up a baby to change her diaper
- Shifts from one activity to another or geographical location to another — like getting into the car
- Changes in the normal daily routine — like sleeping in a motel or at Grandma's instead of at home
- Expectations not met or changed — such as giving your child a red glass instead of his favoured green one

You don't get to choose how adaptable you are, nor does your

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## PARENTING POINTS

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child, but you can learn to cope with transitions. Recognizing transitions and understanding your child's reaction to them is essential to winning his co-operation.

How can you help? Remember, the slow-to-adapt child is not intentionally misbehaving or trying to make her parents look bad in public—she truly finds dealing with change challenging.

Give her the words to express her feelings: "You are upset because you were surprised." "Change is difficult for you, but you do it all of the time.

Remember last week when ..." "You feel better when you know what to expect."

Routines are key to independence and provide a sense of control. Think about your child's morning or bedtime routines. Try to keep the steps to a minimum and as simple as possible.

Allow enough time to make the transition. Rushing a child through her routine will always trigger a slow-to-adapt child. Take notice of how long it really takes for your child to brush her teeth or eat breakfast, or how long she really needs to lie in bed before getting up. If it is a battle to get your child out of the shower in less than 15 minutes, don't fight it—plan for it.

Forewarning is critical. It gives your child a visual picture of the future and helps her get ready mentally for the change. Some kids need to be told hours, days or even weeks in advance what they will be doing. Others will worry and get wound up if you tell them too far in advance. You are the best judge of

what works best for your child. Here are some examples of a few forewarning statements: "When Dad comes home ..." "In 10 minutes you will need to stop and come to ..." Today when I pick you up, we won't be going home, we will go to ..."

If your child likes to finish what he's doing before he can move on to another activity, you may have to help him put closure on the existing activity. You can acknowledge his feelings: "It is hard to stop doing this. You can go back to it later." If he still doesn't want to quit, let him know you are waiting, "I am waiting for you to put your things away." Usually he will put his things away if he knows you are just going to sit there. If he still refuses to cooperate, you might need to say, "You can put that away now or I will help you." Then do it.

A sense of closure is as important to your child as it is to you. Imagine you were watching a show on television and someone came in, turned off the television and said,

"Go to bed now." I bet you would be upset and very unco-operative. What kids are doing is very important to them and they need a chance to find an appropriate stopping point.

The slow-to-adapt child will never jump from one activity to another easily, but you can help him learn to cope with change. With forewarning and preparation, he can get ready for a trip to the store, but his temperament must be considered.

Think about the positive aspects of this temperament trait, also. Because she thrives on routine, your child will probably be very organized. And there is nothing wrong with checking some things out before acting. Sometimes this hesitation helps a person avoid some disastrous or dangerous activities.

» **Thriving With Your Spirited Child, University of Wisconsin Extension, 2007** »  
**Kurcinka, Mary Sheedy, Raising Your Spirited Child. New York: Harper Collins, 1991.**