

## **A New Year a New Room**

With the excitement of the festive season behind us, attention now turns to the events a New Year brings. For some children the excitement of going up to a new room or year level is welcomed, an adventure they cannot wait to sink their teeth into. The flip side for children less enthused about new room adventures is the worry which accompanies the unknown of a new teacher/educator, other staff, and the increased expectations to learn.

### ***Normalising the fear of the unknown***

While it might be easy to assume that all children should be like the great adventurers that grab change and run with it, there is an importance to normalise the feelings that prevent some children from accepting change as easily as their counterparts. The human body is designed to be wary of new things. For some children, like the adventurers, their 'wariness towards change dial' is turned down. For the remainder it can be tuned anywhere between a little and a lot higher.

Thinking that the children who have a higher sensitivity towards change have something wrong with them is an incorrect assumption. Put simply, the feelings and trepidation they have towards new experiences is just their body letting them know that the world feels different. All that separates them and their more enthused peers is a little time and bravery to help them become masters of their own feelings.

### ***Common reactions to change***

Children who are less likely to jump onto the change tracks will often present with emotional reactions ranging from mild reservation to emotional overload. These responses are completely normal and do not necessarily warrant professional intervention. The adult caring for the child will, however, as the one who knows them best, be able to determine if things have reached a point where more than homely comforts, advice and, in some situations, tough love is needed.

### ***Helping the emotionally resistant child***

It can be hard to know where to set the adult beaker in regards to supporting children to adapt to change. The natural inclination is to spare them from the emotional torment that new experiences can bring. However, change cannot be avoided because life never stays the same. The silver lining is that experiences such as new rooms, new teachers, new challenges and new expectations provide children with the opportunity to practise overcoming their emotional reactions to change before they become adults and have to deal with increasingly complex situations.

All successful learning is derived from instances that require children to think, come up with solutions, and to develop an understanding of the predicaments they face. In order to succeed in this arena children need access to opportunities where direct solution-giving is applied sparingly. In some situations solution-giving is easier to avoid than others. For example, it is fairly natural to guide a child to discover the solution to a mathematics problem for themselves, whereas it is more challenging not to offer the solution to an emotionally driven problem, especially when a child is visibly upset or concerned. Nevertheless, if such a strategy can be applied, children will be better equipped to deal with change in the long-term.

Using the same analogy of mathematics can help adults understand how to support children further. When children are learning their times tables there is little expectation for them to be memorised after the first day. As with anything, children need time to use new concepts in real life, apply them to different situations and have opportunities to experience the challenges associated with getting things wrong more than once. As such, learning how to overcome the concern felt towards New Year changes will require time; time to stop wishing things were as they were; time to get used to the new environment; time to learn new routines; time

to learn the nuances between teacher/educator expectations; and time to re-establish a sense of belonging. Providing the allowance of time is given and that no quick-fix, adult-led solutions are employed, children will be given the chance to adapt and accept change. The results of such acceptance will help children get a little stronger and braver, and slowly but surely allow them to catch up to their adventurer counterparts.

### ***Summing it up***

Children have and will always react differently to change. For those who find ease in running towards change we wave them off and wish them well. Others, those who are less eager to jump onto the change train, need additional support and understanding. Part of the journey related to change is acknowledging adverse feelings and accepting that these are perceived as normal. Change is an inevitable part of life. The only way to embrace change is to accept it and learn how to increase emotional resilience. Acceptance and increased emotional resilience can be achieved in multiple ways, some of which include encouraging children to find solutions to their predicaments in a time frame that suits them.

M.J. Fisher  
Child and Family Therapist  
B. Soc. Sc.; GradDip Teaching; Dip. Care and Ed.  
[www.whatmjdoes.com](http://www.whatmjdoes.com)  
© What MJ Does