

# Back to What?! Coping Strategies to Successfully Manage the Transition Back to School

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[www.FormedFamiliesForward.org](http://www.FormedFamiliesForward.org)

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A little about us....



# Formed Families Forward

- A family-led resource center in Northern Virginia supporting foster, adoptive and kinship families who are raising children, youth & young adults with special needs, and professionals who work with our families.
- We offer free training, consultations to families, events, resources, and systems navigation. Also - peer support groups; webinars; virtual trainings; Directory; videos and other resources.
- Family partner to Va Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS; a VDOE project)

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# Upcoming Youth Programing

## **Healthy Relationships Plus** for High Schoolers

7 weeks, Thursday, Oct 6-Nov 17, 2022, 6:15 - 7:45 PM

## **Stronger Together Peer Support Group**

8 weeks, Tuesday, Sept 6-Nov 1, 2022, 6:30 - 8 PM

More information can be found at  
[www.FormedFamiliesForward.org](http://www.FormedFamiliesForward.org)

# Learning Intentions

- Identify common stress responses and impact on school performance;
- Learn three mindfulness techniques to increase resiliency;
- Explore strategies to support academic success;
- Develop a plan to manage setbacks

# Starting a new school year

- Transitions can be challenging
- More so for children with special needs
- And particularly for foster, adoptive and kinship care children and youth
- May include some challenging behaviors and stress responses



# Poll common behaviors

Crying/anxiety

Difficulty completing schoolwork

Struggling with rules

Trouble settling down for bedtime routine

Aggressive behavior

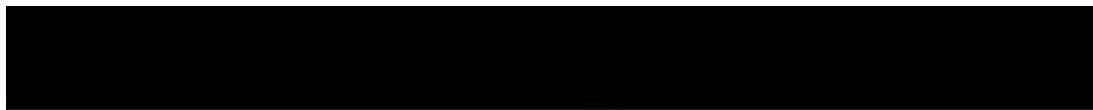
# Behavior through a Trauma Lens

- Behavior is communication.
- Is this behavior the result of a trauma trigger?
- Or a stress reaction to the transition?
- What make your child feel safe?



# What is stress and what does it do?

- A state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances
- Stress hormones trigger a **fight, flight or freeze** response that helps us to react quickly
- Stress may be positive or negative



# Common stress reactions

- Anxiety or nervousness
- Anger or irritability
- Difficulty concentrating or forgetfulness
- Depression, low mood, or crying
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Muscle or headaches
- Withdrawal



*What are your  
stress reactions?  
Your children's?*

# Impact on school performance



- Not able to follow directions
- Difficulty focusing on a task
- Struggle to control emotions and behavior
- Difficulty adjusting to different expectations in different environments
- Reduce problem solving


Center on Child Development, 2011

# What can we do?



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# Connection is key

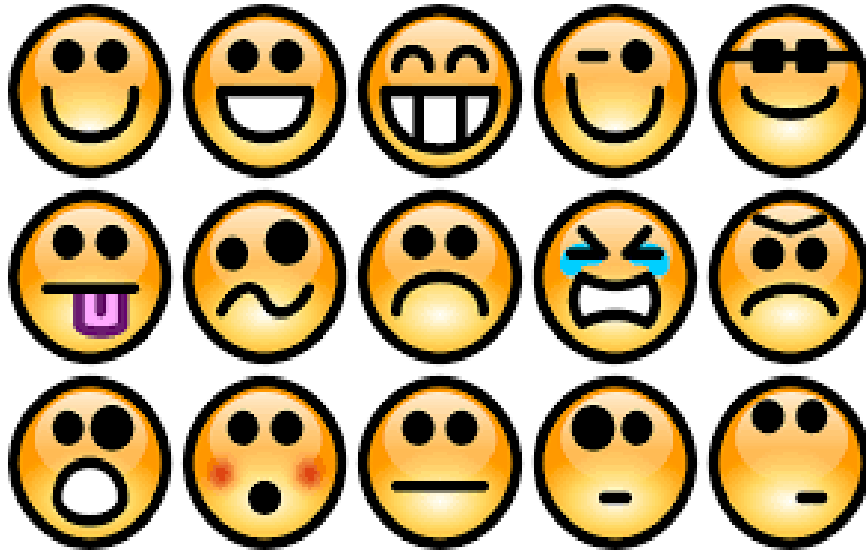
- Building connections is about **positive time** and **attention**.
  - When life gets busy, remember you can do small things often.
- 
- Make everyday moments playful and interactive!

# Emotional Regulation and Contagion

- Ability to monitor or modulate emotions and how you experience and express them.
- Leads to higher frustration tolerance and resiliency
- Learning through observation and modeling
- Emotional contagion

Source: Positive Solutions for Families Program,  
National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations.  
[ChallengingBehavior.org](http://ChallengingBehavior.org)

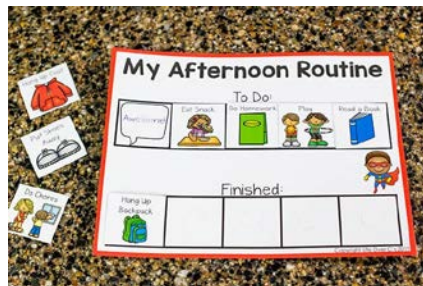
# Name It to Tame It



- *Notice* the feeling
- *Label* the feeling
- *Name* the feeling

# Visual Support

- Photographs
- Drawings
- Objects
- Written words
- Lists



Source: Positive Solutions for Families Program,  
National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations.  
ChallengingBehavior.org

# Scripted Story

- Short and descriptive
- Includes each step in the routine

Written in first person as if child is talking:

“I will...”

“When I do...”

“My family will...”

- Include photos of child or related images
- Read the story: before, during (to show steps) and after the routine



Source: Positive Solutions for Families Program, National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. [ChallengingBehavior.org](http://ChallengingBehavior.org)

# Offer Choices

- Offer throughout the day or when anticipating challenging behaviors
- Only offer 2 choices
- Options are reasonable and available
- Offer choice verbally (words) or visually (pictures or objects)
- Honor the child's choice immediately

Source: Positive Solutions for Families Program, National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. [ChallengingBehavior.org](http://ChallengingBehavior.org)

# Embedded Preferences



- People
- Objects
- Locations
- Activities

? *What are some of the preferences and interests your child has?*

Source: Positive Solutions for Families Program, National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. ChallengingBehavior.org

# Additional tips to manage stress

- Plan and prepare
- Organization
- Routines
- Communicate with school staff
- Talk about feelings
- Allow ample time
- Accept that transitions take time both small and large
- Establish a calming space
- Sleep, eat, exercise regularly
- Keep a sense of humor
- Be kind to yourself and your children

# Encouraging Statements

- You put everything in the toy box!
- Wow! You did such a great job picking up your toys tonight.
- It's so much fun to play with you!
- You were being such a great helper when you helped me bring the groceries inside.
- Thank you for using your inside voice when your sister was sleeping.



# Encouragement with Positive Comments

**Behavior**

**Desired Behavior**

**Positive**

**Encouragement/Feedback**

Not listening

Follow directions

“Thank you for listening, Asha, and for putting your books away.” (gives a hug)

Yelling

Use inside voice

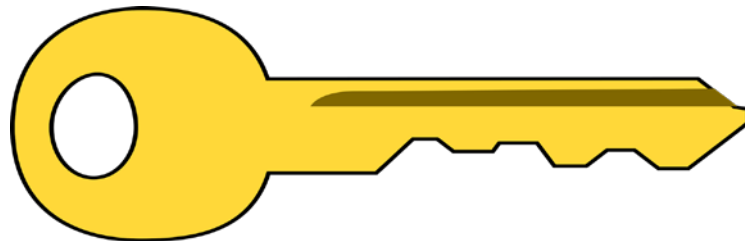
“Wow, Jayden! You are using an inside voice. You are such a big kid.” (gives a high five)

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# Consistency is Key

- Keep the day-to-day routines as close the same as possible
- Help your child learn to learn and follow the steps of the routine
- Share a sample of visual schedule and show how easy changes can be made



# Transitions

- Involves moving from one place to another
- Occurs several times throughout the day
- Can be overwhelming or difficult
- When and how often they occur are usually decided by an adult

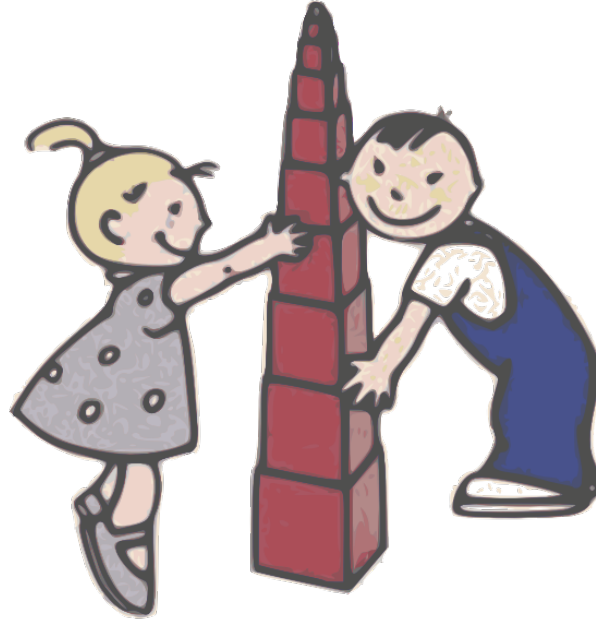
# Transition cues



First.....



Then.....



? What kinds of ***first/then*** statements have you used?

# Self care



- Sleep, eat, exercise
- Connect with others
- Art
- Get out in nature
- Gratitude
- Play
- Listen or play music
- Read
- Watch a movie
- Bubble bath, massage
- Whatever works for you!

# Mindfulness

*“The practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one’s thoughts, emotions, or experiences on a moment-to-moment basis.”*

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>

# Mindfulness activities

- Just breathe, 4 x 4 breathing
- Mindful walk or another version
- Use your five senses to ground yourself-name 5 things you can see, 4 you can feel, 3 hear, 2 you can smell and 1 you can taste



# Strategies to support academic success

- Get to know your child's teachers
- Get involved in the school
- Communicate regularly with the school and your child
- Ask for help if needed or if you don't understand something such as an IEP or a report
- Develop a schedule including a regular homework time
- Have a "landing pad"
- Manage stress, yours and your child
- Build a community, other parents, relatives, friends, daycare providers, other providers, peers, mentors, tutors.

# Know what is reasonable



Know your child's abilities and limitations

- Does my child know what this means?
- Is my child physically able to do this?

Keep expectations realistic

- Do I have to remind them repeatedly?
- Do I find myself getting frustrated?

# When things don't go according to plan...

- Take a breath
- Identify the issue
- Review the plan
- Laugh
- Develop a new plan
- Ask for help



# Celebrate When Things Go Well



*? How does your family celebrate when things go well?*

# Formed Families Forward – Stay in Touch!

**PLEASE COMPLETE EVALUATION.**

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