

The CHANGES Communication Tool - Sample Script

As I offer you words that you can use to implement the CHANGES tool, please keep at the forefront of your mind that these words are the tiniest part of the intervention—they are just a conduit for connection. Words are tools, use them or don't use them, but be sure that you are completely present and dedicated to what is happening for your child when you engage in this conversation.

If finding words that feel right for you and your family, that help you to express yourself, and to open the door to your child's expression of their experience is a struggle, please feel free to borrow the words offered below.

C - Communicate What Has Happened

I know you might have noticed a lot of things have been different lately. A big change is happening in our lives (your life, our community, in your family). I want to tell you about it.

Describe the situation as best as you can to your child.

H - How Do You Feel and What Thoughts Do You Have About What Has Happened?

Sometimes when things change in our lives, we feel new and uncomfortable feelings about the change. Sometimes we have good feelings that make us feel happy, and sometimes we have stormy feelings that make us feel mad. Lots of adults have these feelings too. Our minds get busy trying to make sense of all these new feelings, and we end up with new thoughts swirling around in our heads. That is normal. I want to know everything you have been feeling and thinking about [insert specifics to your situation]. Please tell me all the feelings and thoughts you have had since this change started to happen.

A - And Now

It's important for us all to understand what is happening right now. When [insert type of change] happens, some things can't be like they were before. That's what is happening for other families (other schools, other communities, etc.) that are going through something like this as well. Their lives are changing too.

Today . . . [insert information that affects your child's day-to-day situation] This week, some things are going to be different. For example . . . [insert more changes you know will be in place for the child in the short term] For the next month or so . . . [insert changes that will still be the same over the next few weeks]

N - Nerves, Worries, and Fears

New and different experiences can feel scary. Sometimes when [insert your situation] happens, we have a lot of worries about what has happened or what might happen next. When those worries build up in our bodies, we can feel sick. We might get a headache, or a tummy ache, or we can want to cry, or hit, or scream. Big worries like that happen for adults and other children too. It can be helpful to talk about the things that scare us and the worries we have in our bodies. Your worries and fears are important to me, and I want to hear every single one. Let's talk about them.

G - Going Forward

Things are going to continue to be different for the next little while, and I don't know everything that is going to happen. Here's what I know will happen for sure . . . [insert changes you know are coming] Here are some ideas about what might happen [list possible changes that might occur]. No one knows yet what will happen for sure, so all these things are just "maybes." When change happens like this, we have to wait and see how things will go. Other families who are in a similar situation don't know for sure what is going to happen to them either.

E - Everyone and Everything That Supports You

When something happens that we have lots of new feelings and thoughts about, it can be helpful to have people in our lives that help us feel safe and strong. When things change, and we feel nervous or worried, it can help us manage if we have things we can do to make our bodies feel better. When I'm sad or scared, I talk to [insert your support person or group of people], and when my mind starts to list all my worries, I [insert something physical you do when you get anxious to feel better, i.e., go for a walk, take a bath, drink some water, take a nap, etc.]

Tell me who you have in your life to talk to.

Give me some names of people who you feel good with when you are around them.

If you could go to the park with one person, who would it be?

If you could play with one person, who would it be?

If you were feeling scared, who would you call?

If you needed help, who would be there to help you?

What activities do you like to do that make your body and mind feel calm?

S - Silly and Serious Questions

When new and different situations happen in our lives like [insert your specific change], we often have lots of questions about what's happening. Sometimes kids wonder silly things like if they'll still get to eat their favorite meal for dinner, and sometimes they wonder serious things like when they will get to see someone they care about again. Everyone has questions, and all questions are normal. I have questions about some of this too. Let's take turns asking each other questions and see if we can help each other find some answers.

Continue asking and answering until your child runs out of questions to ask or feels satisfied in this conversation. Feel free to give your child permission to ask you future questions anytime or to give them guidance on when you're available to answer more questions. For example, it's okay to say: Every evening after brushing your teeth and before stories, we're going to have a ten-minute question time (or a similar period of time during the day that suits your schedule) for you to ask me any questions that come to your mind during the day.

Language is one of the ways adults can connect, attune, and regulate to a child. Yet it is more important to be present for a child and committed to a child's emotional experience than it is to know how to say the right words.