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IN THIS ISSUE:

"Continuity gives us roots; change gives us branches, letting us stretch and grow and reach new heights."

~Pauline R. Kezer

School Transitions:

- [Plan, Prepare & Practice](#)
- [Be Calm & Positive](#)
- [Stay Involved](#)
- [Transition Resources](#)

Matrix Events:

- [Online Auction](#)
- [Author's Luncheon](#)
- [Marin Human Race](#)

More Useful Information:

- [Correction](#)
- [HELP Sheets](#)
- [Website Additions](#)
- [Going to College.org](#)

School Transition in your Child's Future? Helpful Tips for a Smooth Transition

Change is an inevitable part of life...and it's almost never easy. For any of us a transition into a new setting brings with it fresh experiences, a need for rapid adjustments, and a multitude of feelings, including excitement, worry, anticipation, and resistance. Children and youth with special needs can have particular difficulty with transitions, thus it is important to be mindful of this as you approach transition periods and plan accordingly so that your child will have as smooth a transition as possible. What can you do to help? Read on for some helpful tips and links to information that will help your child and your family sail through the next transition period, helping your child to reach new heights.

Plan, Prepare, and Practice

Both parents and children should begin planning early for known transitions because children with special needs often need more time to adjust to changes and new settings. The key to helping children deal with transitions is to follow your child's lead, giving them as much information as they are comfortable with and can gradually adjust to. Some children are overwhelmed with too much foreshadowing and it is important to be mindful of this. When possible, gradual exposure to the new setting can be a helpful tool, allowing them to experience what the new setting may be like in short increments. For instance, if your child will be going to a new school or classroom, short visits to the new school or classroom can help them become acquainted with the new setting and ease any fears of the unknown. Practice of any new skills that will be needed is also useful, allowing them to build confidence in their abilities. Keeping home routines as normal as possible during transition periods can also offer children stability and help them better adapt to the new situation. The following **Great Schools** article highlights the transition to middle school, but also offers some helpful tips that are applicable to most school transitions – [Follow this link to read more.](#)

Be Calm, Cool, and Collected

Transitions can be difficult for everyone, including parents. Be mindful that your attitude in the face of change can carry over to your children and help them feel safe in any new environment and comfortable enough to function productively. Your calmness and positive attitude lets them know that you are confident in their ability to adapt to their new circumstances. Regardless of how you personally feel about the change, try to be positive for your child. Talk positively about your own experiences with change and how exciting it is that your child is getting older and moving to a new stage. Positive parent expectations about school and major life transitions, such as starting work or leaving home have a big effect on children, even if they don't outwardly show it. Of course, maintaining a calm, positive outlook is not always easy. Why? Parents also have transition needs as moving up often means increasing independence from parents and letting go by the parent. Letting go is not easy! The article **Letting Go: Tips for Parents of New College Students** recognizes how

hard it can be to let go, not just when your child leaves for college, but also when he or she begins to move towards adulthood: "...this is a time of ambivalence for all parents. The excitement and joy about opportunities awaiting your child are mixed with the waves of nostalgia and a sense of loss." [Follow this link to read more.](#)

Stay Involved

Maintaining an open, communicative relationship with your child during periods of transition is just as important as planning and preparing for each transition. Let your child know that he or she can talk to you about any feelings of fear, anger, stress or worry they may have and validate their concerns, encouraging them to be honest with you and come to you when they have problems. Understanding your child's wants, needs, and fears will also help you in your important role as an advocate for your child during transition planning.

Whether a child with special needs is transitioning from Pre-School to Kindergarten or moving to Adult Living, parents must be involved in the transition planning process for that child. You know your child better than anyone else, thus you can serve as a critical resource in pinpointing the specific skills needed by them to ensure that they will have appropriate options available to them not only during the school years, but also when they leave school. Who works with you on all this? Case Providers, School Special Education and General Education staff, Regional center staff, and your local parent center - [Matrix](#), in addition to friends, relatives, and others. Become informed, remain motivated, and stay involved and you will realize your goal of helping your child succeed in school, work, and community living.

Transition Resources

Matrix has many [useful materials and publications](#) available to address transition questions and needs, particularly the transition periods that commonly bring more adjustments. These are:

[Going from Early Start \(IFSP\) to Preschool \(IEP\)](#): Changes in the system that serves your child: new forms, new procedures and possible move of your child into group educational setting.

[Going from Preschool to Kindergarten](#): Moving to a bigger school, more academic work!

[Going from Elementary School to Middle School](#): Changing classes, multiple teachers, more homework to manage, new social setting & moving into the teen years.

[Going from Middle School to High School](#): Beginning work on graduation requirements, the High School Exit Exam, new social setting and exposure to more "teen" life.

[Going from High School to Adulthood](#): Job, school, living skills and increased independence! An IEP must include a transition plan during the year your student turns 16. More resources for moving to adulthood include:

The California Department of Education's publication **Transition to Adult Living: A Transition Resource Guide**, written to help navigate what can be a confusing time for many young adults and parents. [Download this excellent resource on our website -- click here.](#)

The new **Matrix Help Sheet** on Transition is another resource that can answer the question, "[Help! My teen who receives Special Education is turning 18, what should I know or do?](#)" ;

or visit [the Links section on the Matrix website](#) for links to other helpful websites, organizations, and publications for Transition to Adulthood and Work.

MATRIX EVENTS

Matrix Online Auction Fundraiser is now open! March 16th to March 31st.

Your participation in fundraisers like the Matrix Online

Auction help support Matrix in numerous ways. Whether you choose to donate an item, sponsor the auction, or shop and bid on items, such as a balcony cabin on Royal Caribbean's Oasis of the Seas Inaugural Cruise, know that you're helping to make a lifetime of difference for thousands of children in our communities because you care about their future. Matrix fulfills a vital need, supporting North Bay families as they learn to effectively navigate the complex services with which they must deal. We cannot do it without you! Check back often to see what's new and feel free to place a Watch on your favorites, so that you'll know as soon as bidding begins -- [visit the Matrix Auction site now!](#)

2nd Annual Author Luncheon featuring author, Joan Ryan, April 30, 2009 at Book Passage in Corte Madera.

This year's luncheon speaker will be the wonderfully gifted author, Joan Ryan, reading from her book, *The Water Giver: The Story of a Mother, a Son, and Their Second Chance* (available September 2009, Simon & Shuster). Our Annual Luncheon honors and supports the vital services that Matrix has provided families for more than 25 years, offers insights about children with special needs and their families to our entire community, and enhances opportunities for community collaborations to celebrate all our children. Visit [our website](#) for more details, including a detailed biography of our featured author, Joan Ryan.

Marin Human Race, May 9, 2009

Matrix is currently seeking participants (walk, run or roll), supporters, and sponsors for the 2009 Marin Human Race. You do not need to be a Marin resident or worker to participate—and our earnings support our work in all the counties we serve. Our goal this year is to raise a minimum of \$15,000! Participants can sign up as individuals, get their entire family signed up, or go with friends or colleagues. We'll have teams & prizes and fun! No donation is too small or too large—nor can there be too many! Online or paper registration for participation will be possible. Register or donate online through our official Marin Human Race web page -- [click here to go there now.](#) If you choose to register on line, please forward your confirmation registration to <mailto:brendagm@matrixparents.org>; otherwise neither the Human Race office nor Matrix will know that you are a part of the Matrix team, raising funds for Matrix. Our Volunteer Matrix Human Race Team Leader this year is client Nancy Petranto.

MORE USEFUL INFORMATION

CORRECTION:

In the February issue of the Express, in response to a FAQ of parents regarding emotional issues getting in the way of a child's education, the answer given was to contact Community Mental Health (CMH) directly. However, for any student to receive mental health services (AB3632) the student must first be designated as a Special Education student by the school. Only then, if there are concerns about the student's mental health interfering with the student's ability to benefit from his or her education, is a referral made to CMH for assessment. The best way to go would be for the parent of a Special Education student to talk to the Special Education Director at their school and/or request an IEP to discuss making a referral to CMH. We apologize for the confusion.

New Matrix Help Sheets

Matrix has developed new publications to concisely address the pressing questions of many parents of children with special needs, including:

- I don't think my child's IEP is working well, what do I do?
- My child's behavior is getting in the way of learning.
- How do I evaluate treatments and interventions?

- My child got suspended, what do I do?
- I think my child is bullied at school, what do I do?
- My child isn't doing well in school, what do I do?
- What do I do, my child won't go to school?
- My teen who receives Special Education is turning 18, what should I know or do?

Visit the [Matrix Resource Material section of our website](#) to download your own copies of Matrix Help Sheets.

Matrix Website Additions

Have you visited our website lately? We are continuously adding more information and features to our website, including a new section on [Time Sensitive Information regarding News, Events, and Advocacy](#) -- this is where we will post vital information for the special needs community, including budget crisis information and advocacy opportunities. Visit <http://www.matrixparents.org/> to stay informed and involved, while also learning how to let your voice be heard on behalf of children with special needs.

New Website for College-bound Students with Disabilities

A new website - <http://www.going-to-college.org/>- has been developed to help high school students learn about living college life with a disability. The site provides video clips, activities, and resources that can help students get a head start in planning for college. Video interviews with college students with disabilities offer a way to hear firsthand from students with disabilities who have been successful. Modules include activities that will help students explore more about themselves, learn what to expect from college, and equip them with important considerations and tasks to complete when planning for college.

Matrix serves families in 4 counties: Marin, Napa, Solano and Sonoma, with offices in Novato and Fairfield.

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