

# Hecht: Change can be hair-raising. Here's how to respond as a parent.

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It was the end of a month away from home at summer camp (approximately a kajillion years ago), and I was running in circles like a dog waiting for my parents to pick me up. Most of the other kids' parents had already arrived; where were mine?

Suddenly, I noticed two strange grownups striding toward me. The woman's face was framed in an unfamiliar mass of unruly brown curls and the man's hair was a curious shiny jet black. I could feel my heart beating faster. These were not my parents.

Except that they were. They'd just changed their hair. It took some convincing, but I finally allowed them to take me home.

Any change to the status quo can shake up a kid, even something as innocent as hair. In fact, it can cause mass mayhem.

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When I went cold turkey on the hair dye, a bunch of kids at school went ballistic. Suddenly, I was surrounded by the Future Hairdressers of America wielding brown magic markers, anxious to cover up my newly sprouted gray hairs.

"You don't look the same," a kid who'd been absent for a week, wailed. "Your hair's got ... ugh ... white in it."

"Don't worry, it's still her — she's just old," a young observer explained to the injured party.

## When routines change

Throwing a wrench into the routine without fair warning can also cause problems.

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"But we always go to the playground on Thursdays," several pint-sized dissidents whined. When our after-school schedule is altered, I typically have a mutiny on my hands. In no time flat, I am handed a harshly worded petition signed by dozens of kids to right my wrong (obviously, some of them feel so strongly about it, that they have to sign it more than once.)

"Are you saying you wouldn't rather have popsicles and hurl water balloons at me?" I yell back over the din of the angry mob members, who are crushed and emotionally shattered by my interference in their daily schedule. Instant revelry ensued, with fist bumps, back slaps and cheering louder than a rowdy rock concert. Funny how the mere mention of sugar and violence can totally turn around a young crowd.

## Responding to change

Change is a necessary and healthy part of life. I had to repeat this meditative mantra for about several thousand times to calm down after noticing a hair growing on my son's face. Then I tried to pluck it out while he wasn't looking, but that didn't work either.

Meanwhile, the ability to roll with the punches can depend on personality, environment and/or maturity level. Trips to the ice cream shop or the promise of extra screen time may bribe, I mean, encourage flexibility, but not always.

When our family moved to Asheville some years ago, my 5-year-old boy was excited to explore a new place. The 10-year-old girl, on the other hand, was hopping mad for months, even with the extra TV time and ice cream. (Though perhaps she was playing us.)

It's tough, but a dose of patience and sensitivity on a parent's part helps, particularly when they're little and learning how to adjust to new things. The particularly anxiety-prone may also need to talk it out and ask lots of questions when things don't go exactly as expected. And while they may thoroughly mourn an especially challenging change of scenery, remind them of the positives, like leaving behind a former best friend who rarely took showers and kind of smelled.

Keeping up family routines and traditions, especially amidst times of flux, is important. It also helps to polish your acting skills so that you can role model a healthy and mature way to cope with change. For instance, it's best to avoid looking at a formerly adorable, angelic child (who's now hairy, pimply and moody) with a dreamy, out-of-focus stare while reminiscing about the past.

And, last thing to consider: Maybe leave your hair alone until when, at the age of hopefully younger than 30, they finally move out.

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