



### Top 10 TIPS to Support Children During Times of Uncertainty and Stress

Presented by:  
Julie Kurtz, Founder and CEO  
Author and National Speaker  
Center for Optimal Brain Integration®  
[www.optimalbrainintegration.com](http://www.optimalbrainintegration.com)



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## Definition of “Big Life Change or Transition

The process of changing from one familiar event, person, object, activity or routine and moving to a new one.

A child leaves the familiar and is placed into a new situation that has uncertainty, unexpected routines, changing roles and expectations.

An unexpected and unplanned life change.

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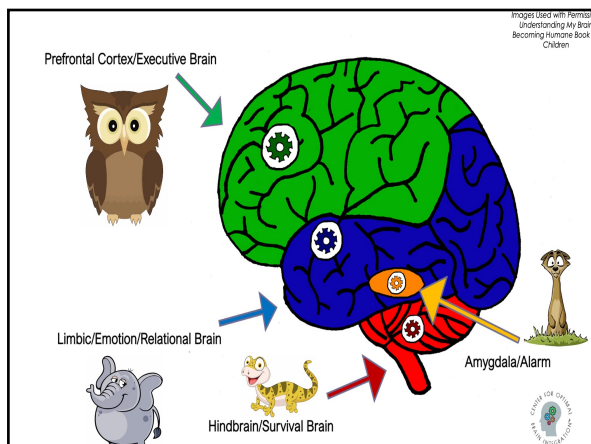
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**T.I.P.S**  
*(Trauma Informed Practice Strategies)*  
**for Helping Children Navigate Big Life Changes**

Tip Tip #1 Predictable Routines and Safe Spaces

Tip Tip #2 Listen to a Child's Feelings

Tip Tip #3 Play and Spend Quality Time with a Child (Connection)

Tip Tip #4 Prepare in Advance, Visit or Preview a New Situation, Environment or Routine

Tip Tip #5 Give Children Choice and Voice

Tip Tip #6 Take Care of Yourself

Tip Tip #7 Stay Calm to Co-Regulate

Tip Tip #8 Read Books about Change and Transition

Tip Use the Environment to Calm the Stress Response System

Tip Tip #10 Refer to a Professional if Persistent Fears Continue

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PSA is in English and Spanish Found on our YouTube Channel at Center for Optimal Brain Integration



Supporting Children to Feel Safe During Stressful and Uncertain Times

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**TIP #1**  
**Predictable Routines and Safe Spaces**

Keep a routine as much as possible

Maintaining a routine helps children feel safe and reduces anxiety and helps children feel in control

Bring as much predictability as possible

Routines let children know "what to expect"

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## Predictable Routines and Visual Schedules

Consistent and predictable routines and schedules promote children's sense of safety as children feel less anxious when they know what to expect.

Using photos of the children and including them in developing the visual schedule will increase their interest, involvement and responsiveness to the schedule.

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### Calming Down Areas/Safe Zones

**A time to pause, CALM and get away**

- Space is quiet, regulating and comforting.
- **NEVER** a punishment, time-out or place a child is sent. The child is always in control of choosing to go there.
- Sensory objects to calm and comfort:
  - ☐ Art supplies
  - ☐ Books
  - ☐ Photos of nature
  - ☐ Emotion and Sensory check in chart
  - ☐ Emotional thermometer
  - ☐ Solution kits
  - ☐ Chairs and blankets
  - ☐ Sand
  - ☐ Paper to crumple and throw in trash
  - ☐ Sun glasses or hats
  - ☐ Music choices w headphones
  - ☐ Bean bag chair
  - ☐ Glitter jar
  - ☐ Regulating apps (stop, breath, think)



**Calm Down Corner Rules**

1. Set Timer for 3 minutes.
2. Choose:
3. Talk to Me, or go back to work.

<https://feedthebrainmatters.weebly.com/How-Do-I-get-things-done-when-I-am-overwhelmed>

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Children look for a **PERSON, PLACE, SENSORY ACTIVITY OR OBJECT** to help calm them and to feel safe and secure.

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### Calming Areas or "Safety Zone"

- Sensory material to help regulate
- A time to pause, CALMING and get away
- Space is enjoyable, comforting, safe and soft
- Have sensory and/or feeling words, thermometers
- One child at a time/private

Robin Pence, Lynwood Elementary

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### Bins and Objects to Promote Regulation

Columbia State  
Preschool, Tehama COE

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### Calming Objects or Bins

Objects that may help children regulate their sensory and emotional state when dysregulated:

**Ideas:**

- Fidget toys
- Calm down toolbox
- Emotional thermometer
- Feeling chart
- Sensory Chart
- Art materials
- Breathing strategies
- Coping skills toolbox
- Journal for each child

<http://learningwithkittys.com/2016/04/05/10-ways-to-make-a-calm-down-toolbox/>

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## Predictable Transitions

- **Minimize** the **number** of transitions
- Provide a verbal and/or audio **signal**
- Need **something to do** while waiting
- Create **rituals** for each transition so it becomes a familiar and predictable routine and habit.

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### TIP #2 Listen to a Child's Feelings

- It is important to listen and acknowledge how a child is feeling
- The research shows verbally or nonverbally talking or drawing about how you feel with someone who cares about you can buffer stress and calm the activated sensory response system
- Don't ignore it or say, "that is silly" or "get over it"
- Say, "change can be difficult, and all of your feelings are okay to have. It is okay to feel sad, mad, worried, happy or scared"

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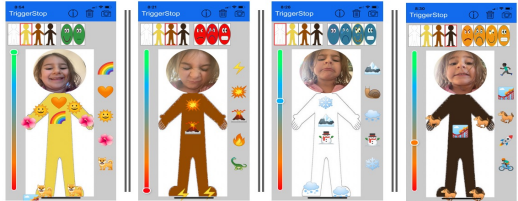
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Help Children Communicate Using Trigger Stop: Sensory and Emotional Check-In APP

Free User Guide, Video and APP at [www.optimalbrainintegration.com](http://www.optimalbrainintegration.com)



Trigger Stop: Sensory and Emotional Check in Application  
Created by Julie Kurtz  
Center for Optimal Brain Integration

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**Green Zone**



Don't forget that with the camera, a child can practice snapping a photo of what their face looks like when they are happy. They can immediately add it to the body of the figure.

**Emotions or Sensory Language**

- Calm
- Happy
- Flexible
- Easy-going
- Cool
- Sunny
- Rainbows

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**Blue Zone**



Don't forget that with the camera, a child can practice snapping a photo of what their face looks like when they are scared. They can immediately add it to the body of the figure.

**Emotion or Sensory Language**

- Frozen
- Nothing
- Stuck
- Scared
- Frightened
- Iceberg
- Slow
- Snail

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**Orange Zone**



Don't forget that with the camera, a child can practice snapping a photo of what their face looks like when they are frightened. They can immediately add it to the body of the figure.

**Emotion or Sensory Language**

- Scared
- Frightened
- Unsafe
- Running Away
- Roller Coaster
- Jumpy
- Rocket Ship

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# Red Zone

Don't forget that with the camera, a child can practice snapping a photo of what their face looks like when they are angry or frustrated. They can immediately add it to the body of the figure.

## Emotion or Sensory Language

- Scared
- Frightened
- Unsafe
- Angry
- Upset
- Volcano
- Flames
- Lightening

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 A gift to you from Texas Region 4 Head Start and Center for Optimal Brain Integration  
 Free Downloadable at [www.optimalbrainintegration.com](http://www.optimalbrainintegration.com)

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**TIP #3**

**Play and Spend Quality Time with Your Child**

- Intentionally provide personal connection daily with children
- Put down distractions/tasks (*work, planning, virtual devices*)
- Take the child's lead
- Connection provides co-regulation
- Have fun and play

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**Ratio of Negative to Positive**

Directions and Corrections To Positive or Neutral	Positive or Neutral To Directions and Corrections
	
	

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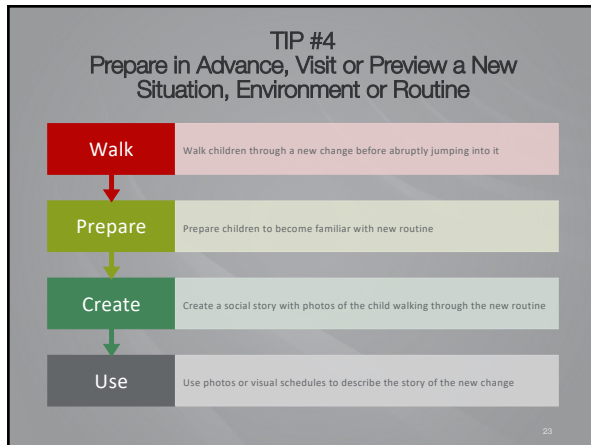
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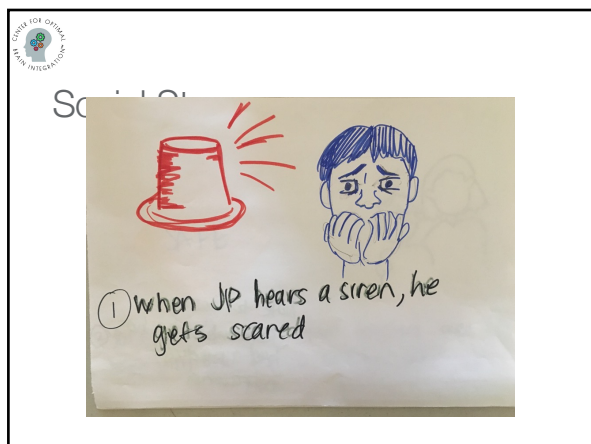
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So... Story



2) You're safe and your teachers are here with you. There's nothing dangerous here.

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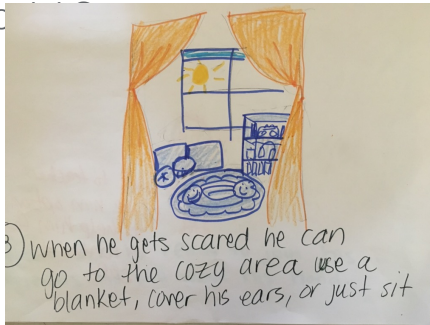
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So... Story



3) When he gets scared he can go to the cozy area use a blanket, cover his ears, or just sit

Tip Sheet for Writing Social Stories #1:  
<https://calinclusion.org/teachingpyramid/classroom-mod2/scripted-stories-for-social-situations-tip-sheet.pdf/>

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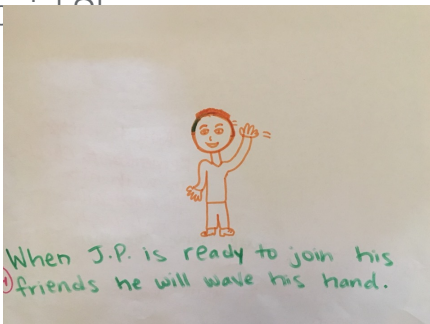
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So... Story



When J.P. is ready to join his friends he will wave his hand.

Tips for Writing Social Stories #2: <https://headstartinclusion.org/tools-and-supports/social-stories/>

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**TIP #5**

**Give Your Child Choice and Voice**

- Acknowledge that big life changes may cause grief or loss (*sadness, anger, emotional reactivity*)
- Understand big life changes may make children feel a loss of control and difficulty finding a voice to communicate
- You can help children by giving them choices (*ex.: would you like to wear this outfit or the other, would you like to read this book or this one*)
- You can help children by helping them communicate their fears non-verbally or verbally

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**TIP #6**

**Take Care of Yourself**

- Be aware of your own triggers and emotional state
- Self-care strategies will be unique to you

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**3 PART BRAIN FUNCTIONING**

<p><b>FOREBRAIN</b></p> <p>"Executive Center"</p> <p>"Air Traffic Control"</p>	<p><b>EXECUTIVE BRAIN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abstract thought</li> <li>Reasoning</li> <li>Impulse control</li> <li>Empathy</li> <li>Perspective taking</li> <li>Logic</li> </ul>
<p><b>LIMBIC BRAIN</b></p> <p>"Emotional Center"</p> <p>"Attachment"</p>	<p><b>MAMMAL BRAIN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attachment</li> <li>Affect regulation</li> <li>Emotional reactivity</li> <li>Significance and belonging</li> <li>Emotions</li> </ul>
<p><b>HINDBRAIN</b></p> <p>"Alarm Center"</p> <p>"Smoke Detector"</p> <p>Brainstem</p>	<p><b>REPTILE BRAIN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motor regulation</li> <li>Heart rate</li> <li>Breathing</li> <li>Blood pressure</li> <li>Body temperature</li> <li>Sensory</li> </ul>

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Dr. Daniel Siegel: Hand Model of the Brain



# EmpowerU

Engage. Empower. Excel

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1. List one strategy you use in the moment that can help you pause to respond NOT react (i.e., calming or grounding strategy).

2. List one strategy you use outside of work to fill up your emotional bucket (self-care strategy)

Relationship, Attunement and the Power of Co-Regulation



**Activity**

Let's Practice

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**S.T.O.P.**

## A Practice of the Pause

STOP brings us to present moment. It can help when you feel distress, creating space to tame your feelings and access self-regulation and grounding strategies to help tame your big emotions and regulate your activated stress response system.

- **S** = Pause or literally just stop
- **T** = Take a deep belly breath (breath is strongest anchor)
- **O** = Observe what is arising inside of you including thoughts, emotions or sensations.
- **P** = Proceed with intentionality



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## S.T.O.P. Tool



STOP brings us to present moment awareness. When you feel distress, use STOP to help you tame big emotions and calm your activated stress response system.

<b>S.</b>	Pause or literally just stop
<b>T.</b>	Take a deep breath (breath is the strongest anchor)
<b>O.</b>	Observe what is arising inside of you including thoughts, emotions and sensations
<b>P.</b>	Proceed with intentionality.

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### TIP #7 Stay Calm to Co-Regulate

Mirror Neurons  
– children  
absorb your  
internal  
emotional state

You are the  
external wi-fi to  
the internal  
world of a child

Children look to  
your face to  
decide if they  
are safe

Children listen  
for your voice  
to determine if  
there is danger

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## Co-Regulation

It is vital for young children who are experiencing stress reactions to have caregivers who can support them to re-regulate their distressed bodies and dysregulated behavior. They are not able to do this on their own and need adults to support them through a process called **co-regulation**.

Nicholson, Perez and Kurtz: Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children

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**TIP #8**  
**Read Books About Change and Transition**

Reading books relatable to the child's situation helps them feel heard and less alone




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Teach Children About Their Brain

**Understanding My Brain**  
**Becoming Human(E)!**


As I learn more about how my brain works, I can make better choices and decisions to be healthy, feel safe and find calm.



For Children Ages 5-10 years  
Author: Julie Kurtz, M.S.

**Understanding My Brain**  
**Becoming Human(E)!**

As I learn more about how my brain works, I can make better choices and decisions to be healthy, feel safe and find calm.



For Children Ages 4-8 years  
Author: Julie Kurtz, M.S.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTCQ1fJ06s>

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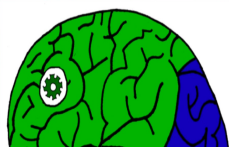
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**Understanding My Brain**  
**Becoming Human(E)!**

As I learn more about how my brain works, I can make better choices and decisions to be healthy, feel safe and find calm.




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### TIP #9

## Refer to a Professional if Persistent Fears Continue

- Persistent challenging behavior
- Persistently shut down (freeze), big reactive emotions (fight) or escaping (flight)
- Child begins to have adverse impacts persistently in one or more areas: emotional, physical or social
- Your child is unresponsive to your support and social-emotional strategies
- Child is not able to function in daily life skills (brushing teeth, eating, social)

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### TIP #10

## Use the Environment to Calm the Stress Response System

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Strategies for Calming Young Children Sensory Response Systems		
<p><b>Visual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dimming the lights</li> <li>Reducing clutter on walls</li> <li>Safe Places/Zones</li> <li>Visual schedules/cues</li> <li>Fish Tanks</li> <li>Transition cues</li> <li>Visuals that guide</li> <li>Timers</li> <li>Nature</li> <li>Animals</li> <li>Family photos</li> </ul>	<p><b>Auditory</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eliminate low frequency sounds</li> <li>Humming or singing</li> <li>Increase vocals/calm voices</li> <li>Playing instrumental music</li> <li>Playing white noise</li> <li>Playing nature sounds</li> <li>Go to quiet area</li> <li>Go to noisy area</li> <li>Listen to music/choices</li> <li>Repeating instructions</li> <li>Calming voices</li> </ul>	<p><b>Tactile</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Patting or rubbing the back</li> <li>Providing textured materials</li> <li>Calming lotion</li> <li>Textured objects</li> <li>Play dough</li> <li>Art supplies</li> <li>Fidget toys</li> <li>Writing materials</li> <li>Squeeze balls</li> </ul>
<p><b>Vestibular</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rocking</li> <li>Swinging</li> <li>Bouncing</li> <li>Swaying</li> <li>Swivel chairs</li> <li>Movement chairs</li> <li>Taking a walk with adult</li> <li>Movement- walking</li> </ul>	<p><b>Proprioceptive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jumping</li> <li>Climbing</li> <li>Yoga</li> <li>Pushing heavy objects</li> <li>Stress balls</li> <li>Squeeze objects</li> <li>Pushing walls</li> <li>Lifting weighted objects</li> </ul>	<p><b>Oral</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take a drink</li> <li>Chew pens</li> <li>Eat food</li> <li>Take deep breaths</li> <li>Suck or bite on lips</li> <li>Eat a snack</li> <li>Gum or hard candy</li> </ul>

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## Reflect and Check



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## Thank You!

**Website:** [www.optimalbrainintegration.com](http://www.optimalbrainintegration.com)

**Facebook:** Center for Optimal Brain Integration

**Instagram:** COBI or Center4OptimalBrainIntegration

**Email:** [optimalbrainintegration@gmail.com](mailto:optimalbrainintegration@gmail.com)

**Julie Kurtz**  
Co-Author of *Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children* and  
*Nicholson, Shimpi Driscoll, Kurtz, Márquez and Wesley (2020) Culturally Responsive Self-Care for Early Childhood Educators*



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## Resources

**Books:**  
*Trauma Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children* by Nicholson, Perez and Kurtz

**Websites:**

- [www.optimalbrainintegration.com](http://www.optimalbrainintegration.com)
- <https://momentousinstitute.org/blog/helping-children-transition-through-big-change>
- <https://www.ourfamilywizard.com/blog/helping-kids-cope-big-transitions>
- <https://wonderscounseling.com/helping-young-children-major-life-changes/>
- [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqjXdKMoPtkQITrxFMXvHA?view\\_as=subscriber](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqjXdKMoPtkQITrxFMXvHA?view_as=subscriber)

**Phone and Tablet APPs:**

- Trigger Stop: Sensory and Emotional Check-In (Julie Kurtz)
- Stop, Breath and Think

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## Books

- [Not This Bear: A First Day of School Story](#), by Alyssa Satin Capucilli
- [It's Not Your Fault, Koko Bear](#) by Vicki Lansky: The story of a lovable bear who doesn't want to have two homes.
- [Two Homes](#) by Claire Masurel: Alex has two favorite chairs: a rocking chair at Daddy's and a soft chair at Mommy's. Through small details like these, "Two Homes" focuses on what is gained rather than what is lost. It conveys that no matter which parent he's with, Alex knows that he is safe and loved. Even the illustrations are comforting and warm.
- [The Invisible String](#) by Patrice Karst: Applicable to any type of separation or loss, this heartwarming picture book is about the invisible and unbreakable bonds that connect us to our loved ones, no matter where they are.
- [Dinosaur Divorce](#) by Marc Brown
- [You Were the First](#) by Patricia McLachlan
- [Babies Don't Eat Pizza: A Big Kid's Book About Baby Brothers and Sisters](#) by Dianne Danzig: This book blends matter-of-fact information with kid-friendly humor to answer all the questions new big siblings have. The book refers to the new sibling as "your baby" and frequently references readers' own babyhood. Practical tips for parents are included, too.
- [One Special Day: A Story for Big Brothers and Sisters](#) by Lola M. Schaefer
- [Neighborhood](#) by Jason Fruchter: In this sweet board book, Daniel Tiger gets a new neighbor. Moving is scary at first, but the new neighbor soon feels right at home.
- [A Kiss Goodbye](#) by Audrey Penn: Chester the raccoon, of the beloved story "The Kissing Hand," is moving.
- [My Very Exciting, Sorta Scary Big Move](#) by Lori Attanasio Woodring

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