The transition from children’s ministry to youth ministry is a time most children look forward to because it is evidence of their move toward maturity and independence. Yet, even the most confident preteen experiences some anxiety over moving up to youth ministry. As children’s ministers it is our responsibility to help preteens make the move into youth ministry with confidence and ease.

Develop a transition strategy...

Involve everyone
One person can’t accomplish transitioning children from children’s ministry to youth ministry successfully. The children’s ministry director, children’s ministers who minister to the preteens, the youth minister and those who minister to incoming teens, as well as parents should be involved in the transition between children’s ministry and youth ministry.

Determine when
At what age or grade level do the children in your ministry move up to youth ministry? Many local ministries follow the model of the public school system in their community. If the sixth graders transition to middle school, the sixth graders in children’s ministry transition into youth ministry. If the transition to junior high is in seventh grade, children move into youth ministry as seventh graders. Transitioning based upon grade level rather than age allows all children to move up at the same time (the beginning of the school year or the ending of the school year).

Ministries that have not determined a specific age or grade level for transitioning children into youth ministry will be viewed as inconsistent and partial. Transitioning will be subject to the whims of the children—
- Children will move up whenever they feel that they are too “mature” for children’s ministry
- Children will move up whenever friends decide to move up
- Children will move up whenever they are in disagreement with a children’s minister or a children’s ministry policy.

Have a plan
Don’t expect the transition to be smooth if children simply are in children’s ministry one week and youth ministry the next. Develop transitional mini-steps that will help prepare each child socially and spiritually so that the move from children’s ministry to youth ministry doesn’t seem like a gigantic leap.

WARNING!
Not all children are ready to move up to youth ministry. If possible, provide an alternative if the child does not feel ready to make the transition. Most 6th and 7th graders just aren’t ready to socialize with high school students. The best possible solution is to provide a junior high ministry for those preteens who are transitioning out of children’s ministry.

Transition Policy
Most of us don’t like the thought of creating paperwork, but having clear ministry guidelines in the form of policies will prevent problems, provide consistency, and enable effective communication.

In coordination with youth ministry, develop a policy related to when children will be transitioned into youth ministry. The policy should include at what age or what grade children will be transitioned and the approximate date. The policy should also include guidelines for dealing with unusual circumstances such as special needs children who may not be functioning mentally or socially at the level determined for transition.

Make sure every parent of children who are within a year of transitioning to youth ministry have a copy of the transition policy.

Partner with Parents and Youth Ministry
Transition from children’s ministry to youth ministry cannot be successful if a partnership does not exist between the children and youth ministers and the parents. Here’s some ways to build a strong partnership:

Send a letter to parents explaining the coming transition. Include a greeting from new teachers or leaders along with their contact information.

Invite parents and children to attend an information meeting. Make the meeting more than a meeting with the following tips:
- Theme the meeting. Choose a theme that describes the transition such as Building a Bridge, Movin’ Up, Taking the Challenge, etc.
- Engage in interactive activities that involve preteens, parents, children and youth ministers. These activities will help everyone get to know one another.

Scavenger Hunt.
Form teams of at least four. Make sure a children’s minister, youth minister, parent and child are on each team. Give each team the following list and ask them to return to the site within a designated amount of time. (No longer than 5 minutes as you don’t want the meeting to lose focus or drag.)

Items:
- Something that reminds me of the good times I’ve had (or my child has had) in children’s ministry
- Something that illustrates a biblical truth learned in
children’s ministry
- Something that symbolizes youth ministry at this church
- Something that illustrates what I want to experience (or want a child to experience) in youth ministry during the coming year.

When the groups come back together, give each group 2 minutes to share each item and its meaning.

Alphabet Soup
Necessary: a container of plastic or magnetic letters
Have everyone sit in a circle. Pass the container of letters asking each person to quickly take two letters. After everyone has selected letters, give instructions.

Choose one of the letters then come up with something about children’s ministry that you are thankful for that begins with that letter. For example, someone who has selected the letter “T” might share that he is thankful for the teachers who teach Bible truth in children’s ministry.

After everyone has shared, go around the circle again. This time each person is to use the selected letter and share something that they are looking forward to in youth ministry that begins with the selected letter.

Graffiti
Create a graffiti wall from freezer or bulletin board paper. Title one side of the graffiti wall, “Things We Will Miss…” Title the other side, “Things We Are Looking Forward To…” Provide markers. Encourage parents and children to write or draw their thoughts on the graffiti wall.
- Allow time for parents and children to ask questions concerning the transition.
- Provide food. Everyone enjoys eating and eating together encourages fellowship.
- Keep it short. No one enjoys a lengthy meeting.
- Provide details in written form, including what happens when and where it is involved, as parents and children leave.

Connecting Kids with Youth and Youth Ministers
Get Connected Events
Several months prior to the actual transitioning date plan weekly or monthly youth ministry events that include the transitioning preteens. These events are planned with the specific purpose of introducing the preteens to the youth and youth ministry.

Suggested activities:
- Game Night at church.
- Picnic at the park
- Bonfire in the woods

Preteen Retreat
Invite transitioning preteens on an overnight retreat with youth ministry staff and several youth. Plan activities that will encourage relationship building such as ropes courses, canoeing or rafting, cooperative group games, etc. Include times of worship and prayer.

Move with Them!
Preteen teachers and ministry leaders move with the preteens. This provides preteens with needed consistency in leadership until they are fully assimilated into the youth ministry. This requires partnership and cooperation from your preteen leadership and the junior high or youth leadership—but the consistency provided makes it well worth it.

Contact
Ask the youth leaders and teachers to make contact with transitioning preteens via phone calls, e-mails, snail mail, and one-on-one meetings.
Ask several youth with servant hearts to help with transitioning preteens via phone calls, e-mails, snail mail, and one-on-one meetings.

Provide each transitioning preteen with the names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of the youth and youth leaders. Provide youth and youth leaders the names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of the transitioning preteens.

Celebrate!
Transferring from children’s ministry to youth ministry is a time to celebrate. Celebrate with a worship service and/or dinner honoring the transitioning preteens. Be sure to include the following components:
- Allow children’s ministers to share memories and words of encouragement concerning the transitioning preteens.
- Ask the youth minister to share a brief message challenging the transitioning preteens and parents to continued commitment and service.
- Visualize memories. Create a video or bulletin board scrapbook of the transitioning preteens’ involvement in children’s ministry.
- Give the congregation an opportunity to bless each child through prayer and words of affirmation.
- Provide each child with a special gift that acknowledges this rite of passage.