

Helping Your Child with Daily Transitions

Objective

To increase the likelihood your child will make smooth transitions throughout the day.

What to Know

Transitioning to new places and activities is something children do many times each day. But for some children, change can be overwhelming and feel unpredictable.

Many children struggle with transitions, which are common triggers for annoying or upsetting behaviors, like whining, stalling, tantrums, and meltdowns.

You can help your child have an easier time with transitions, but it may take some experimentation to find out what works. When you help your child prepare for transitions you help them learn a valuable skill. Here are some transition tips.

Create routines. Build consistency, routine, and structure into the transition process. For transitions that happen every day, consistent routines can make all the difference. For example, a bedtime routine puts a reassuring and predictable structure in place.

Preview and count down. Each morning you might describe what the day is going to look like. Before each transition, give a timeframe and describe what will happen along with a countdown. You might say, “In 20 minutes (10 minutes, then 5 minutes) it is time to finish breakfast and leave for school.”

Use a timer or funny noise to give your child advance warning. Perhaps your child can “alert” everyone before transition times. For example, ask your child to ring a bell to let the family know it is dinner time.

Play music or sing songs. Make up silly songs together about what you are doing or where you are going.

Use a transition object. Let your child pick out a special object or toy to hold during transitions.

Provide visual cues. Create a chart with drawings about what to expect or the steps involved.

Get their attention. You might need to make a connection to ensure you have your child’s attention and that they understand what you are saying to them. This might include making direct eye contact, sitting next to them, placing a hand on their shoulder, or asking them to repeat what you said.

Give your child a job. Your child might be more cooperative if they can be part of the process. For example, you might ask your child to set the table.

Make it a game. You might be surprised at your child’s creativity and how much fun you have completing transitions that are usually difficult!

Use rewards. Rewards can include stickers, snacks, or a point system that leads to a prize.

Implement appropriate consequences. If a transition does not go well, avoid escalating the situation. If your child really misbehaves, use an appropriate consequence for that behavior.

Praise good transitioning. Recognize when things go well. Be enthusiastic and specific in your praise and follow up with a reward (if appropriate).

The more your child can predict and participate in the schedule and activities of their day, the less likely challenging behavior will occur. This worksheet will help you identify some ways to help your child with transitions.

What to Do

What are your child's typical daily transitions? For example, this might include attending daycare or school, afterschool activities, mealtimes, and so on.

What is your child's most difficult transition?

What happens?

How do you typically respond?

Referring to the above ideas, choose 2-3 tools you can use right away to help your child with transitions. What will you do?

Next, track transitions for the next two weeks using the following chart. Write down the date and describe the activity or transition. Note what tool or tip you used and describe what happened.

Date	Activity/transition	Tool used	What happened?

Date	Activity/transition	Tool used	What happened?

How did the last two weeks go? What worked? What did not work?

What else can you do to ensure your child experiences smooth transitions?
