

Transitions

“Parents and caregivers frequently observe defiance and negativism around transitions.”

~ Stanley I. Greenspan, M.D.

There are times during the day when children are asked to stop what they are doing to move to a new activity or caregiver. These times are known as *transitions*. Some children transition easily and without much fuss. Others find it very difficult. Helping children understand when and why these changes happen is an important part of caregiving. It can foster a child's sense of independence and their willingness to participate.

During a daily transition, I will:

- need a warning so I know that a change is coming.
- sometimes need time to finish what I'm doing before I can make a change.
- begin to talk about transitions. I may say things like “Mommy go?”
- often resist transitions. I may try to find a way to change or avoid them.

My caregivers can help me with transitions by:

- reducing transitions as much as possible.
- giving me a warning when a transition is about to happen. Try saying “We are going to change your diaper after I'm done helping Sam” or “I'll be right back.”
- giving me time to finish an activity if the transition is unexpected, like when someone comes early to pick me up.
- letting me be part of the transition. Try letting me ring the bell to clean up or move my name to a new activity on a daily chart.
- allowing me to use a comfort object, like a blanket or stuffed animal, when making difficult transitions like separating from parents.
- providing enough time for changes in the schedule or setting.
- providing a choice to help me transition, like saying “Would you like to pick up the blocks or the books?”



Provide pictures, charts, and visual signs for children to use during transitions. This helps reduce anxiety and foster independence.

Examples of Verbal Cues to Help with Transitions

- “I’ll be right back.”
- “I’m going to fix lunch. What do you want to play with while I make your lunch?”
- “It’s almost time to pick up.”
- “We have just enough time to finish this puzzle before it’s time to clean up.”

Using Time with Toddlers

Toddlers are just starting to understand simple concepts of time (like “before naptime,” “after lunch,” or “when mommy picks me up”). Use words with time concepts to help them understand transitions. Get down at the child’s level and say something like “Five more minutes to play before snack time” and show them five fingers. Then, come back and say “Two more minutes to play” showing them two fingers this time. This allows you to give the child two visual and verbal cues and introduce the idea of numbers and time.

When a Child has a Difficult Time Transitioning

Infants and toddlers are growing right before our eyes. Although they are very little, their need to be independent is strong. However, their ability to make their own choices is limited. Find ways to help young children feel independent and to participate in the decision. This can help with transitions, and will build a sense of trust and security and help the child feel included.

Some children have a hard time moving to a new activity, no matter how much support you provide. Consistency is the key to helping these children, as well as giving them opportunities to participate.

Provide simple pictures and charts, and tell them what will happen next. This will help them develop new skills and independence over time.



To learn more about transitions, view the Resources and References found at the end of these materials.