

Supporting Transitions

WHAT IS A TRANSITION?

Throughout the day, children experience many **changes** from one **activity** to **another**. Children also experience changes from one place to another and one person to another. Transitions are a **natural** part of the day and happen frequently.



Studies have found that up to **25% of the school day** may be spent engaging in **transition activities**. This may include moving from home to transport, transport to the playground, the playground to the classroom, classroom to circle time, circle time to an activity, activity to activity etc.



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WHY ARE TRANSITIONS DIFFICULT?

For many children, transitions can be **challenging** as they are required to switch their attention from one place, activity, or person to another. This may be particularly difficult if they are engaging in a **preferred activity** and may be asked to transition to something less preferred or perceived as more demanding.

Children may be engaging in an activity with a perceived '**end point**', which may or may not be evident to the adult. It can be difficult for children to move on from something they feel is **incomplete**.

Many children with speech, language and communication difficulties show a **preference** for **predictability**, 'sameness' and consistency. Transitions provide more opportunity to **disrupt** this.

Sequencing information about the day can be **challenging** for many children and transitions may feel like they are going into the '**unknown**'. This unpredictability can increase levels of anxiety and lead to changes in behaviour, impacting participation and engagement in activities.

Transitional periods tend to be **less structured** than other aspects of the day. Children with social communication difficulties may **not recognise** subtle cues around this or know how to respond appropriately to them. For example, a child may not have recognised their peers are tidying or lining up ready for play time, and then is not prepared for the transition.

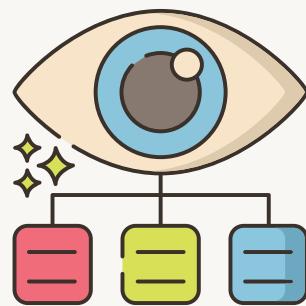
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HOW CAN WE SUPPORT TRANSITIONS?



Create **consistent** routines – it will be **easier** for a child to move through a transition which is familiar and consistent every day. Consistency will help children to **recognise** what activity is about to take place and build **feelings** of predictability, confidence, and independence.

Visuals such as '**First – then**' boards, **objects of reference** or **visual timetables** – these provide additional information to help make sense of the world around us and what might be happening next. Visuals provide **concrete** information to make the transition easier to understand and remember.



Finished/finish later box – a finished box provides another **visual cue** to show an activity has come to an end. For children who have **difficulty** moving on from tasks they feel are incomplete and time constraints apply, a 'finish later box' can help them understand they can **return** to this at a more appropriate time.

Key object/toy for transitions – Some children may find it helpful to have a **comforting object or toy** that remains **consistent** as they transition between environments (e.g., between school and home, home to grandparents). This provides a feeling of consistency and predictability.



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Timers – some children might respond better to sand timers or visual alarm timers to help them **understand how long** is remaining in an activity before they are expected to transition.



Settling periods – Is the child experiencing heightened emotions unrelated to the transition or from a previous transition? Do they need **time** to **regulate** and calm before new demands are placed on them?



Encourage the child to talk about/**share concerns** – If the child is able to, encourage them to express their concerns about transitions or what they find difficult. What would they prefer?



Stick to the schedule – A child will only build their understanding and confidence throughout transitions if **we are consistent** in our approach, and we are where we are supposed to be on the schedule!



Consider alternative opportunities – Are there ways you can change the transition process considering the child's **sensory preferences, skills and experience**? For example, if a child struggles with busy, loud environments could they go into the dining hall first or go through a different door at the start of the school day.



Consider the environment – think about how you could adapt the environment to **prepare for the transition**. For example, when transitioning to bedtime routine, could you darken the room and turn down the volume in preparation for the transition? Consider how you could create clearly defined areas to signal a transition (e.g., clearing the space of toys before mealtimes).

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Countdowns and traffic lights – First-then boards or visual timetables help to build understanding of what is coming next, but don't tell us when- this unknown can increase levels of anxiety for some children. You can build this understanding by using visuals such as traffic lights (e.g., green when the activity is ongoing, yellow when it is almost finished and red when it is time to finish) or verbal countdowns (e.g., 'box is finished in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1' or '2 more minutes then finished, 1 minute then finished') if the child is able to understand this

TOP TIPS

- **Connect** with the child first! As transitions can feel demanding and increase anxiety levels, try to connect with the child on something **meaningful** to them first **before introducing something new** or different. For example, you could join in with their play or talk with them about their interests.
- Can we provide more **choice** throughout the schedule to make the transition easier? For example, could they choose which shoes they will wear, choose their transition object, choose where they will sit in the circle, can they choose what activity comes next?
- Are you being **consistent**? Using visuals is not always a quick fix and many children require a **repeated, consistent approach** in order to build confidence and independence.