

# *Classroom Transitions*

***Developed by Child Care Training  
Consultants***



Take a moment and remember the last time you were absorbed in a really good book or a television show. Or the last time you were in the middle of a great conversation with a friend.

Now think about what it feels like when someone or something else demands your attention in the middle of that activity.

What are some of the emotions that come up? They may include frustration, anger, exasperation, or exhaustion. Children feel these same kinds of emotions, yet don't always have the coping skills to address them in acceptable ways.

Now put yourself back in the middle of that book, television show, or conversation.

This time, imagine that you know ahead of time that you have to stop on page 75, or take a quick break on the next commercial. Knowing what to expect makes your situation a little more manageable.

## Class Overview

- Understanding what transition means
- Scenarios
- Children with autism
- Individualize transitions
- Ideas for transitioning with ease
  - Verbal Cues
  - Routines



2

Transitions will always be difficult for your young child. Developmentally, they're simply not well-equipped to leave an activity they're enjoying and move to a potentially less desirable one. Keep in mind that this, like any other step in your day, will be exacerbated by lack of sleep, hunger, or illness.

Remember, even though your child may put up a fight, you are the one setting the rules and limits. If it's time to leave the playground, it's time to leave the playground.

And luckily, at least for a little while, we're bigger than they are and can scoop them up under our arms when all else fails!



## Learning Objectives

By the end of the training participants will be able to:

- 1) Recognize mixed transitioning messages children learn from adults
- 2) Identify their own values as they work with young children given the resources from the Classroom Transitions Training Course
- 3) Implement clear communication skills between adult care providers and the children in their care
- 4) Organize an early child care facility environment to minimize conflict during transitions

## Transitions

- Transition refers to a change
  - Types of transitions:
    - Transitions between activities
    - Transitions between multiple settings
    - Transitions between programs



4

In a childcare setting, transition help children finish an activity or routine of the day and move on to another one. Because we are often asking a large group of children to do the same thing at the same time, transition times can often be the most chaotic.

There are 3 main types of transitions:

- **Transitions between activities** within a given setting (e.g., snack to playground; outdoor recess to large group)
- **Transitions between multiple settings** on the same day (e.g., preschool to after-school child-care program; Head Start program to child care)
- **Transitions between programs** (e.g., birth-three programs to preschool, preschool to elementary school)

## What Is the Problem?

Michelle is a 3-year-old girl. She enjoys playing in the kitchen center and interacting with friends. When the teacher announces that it is time to clean up and sit on the carpet for group time, Michelle gets very upset. She throws toys and pushes other children. When the teacher comes near her, Michelle starts screaming and saying that she is not finished playing.

5

Has this scenario ever happened in your class?

Possible reasons for Michelle's behavior:

- The time is too short and Michelle barely gets into her play when it is time to clean up
- She needs more warnings to anticipate cleanup time
- She does not like group time (it might be too long, too difficult, etc.)
- She does not understand what it means to “clean up”—how and where to put the toys away

## What Is the Problem?

Jim, a 4-year-old, is a new preschool student. He and the other preschoolers in his classroom are playing on the playground. When Miss Johns calls them to go inside, they all gather next to the entrance door. Jim stays in the sandbox. When Miss Johns approaches him and asks him to come with her, he starts crying and screaming, then drops to the ground.

6

Possible reasons for Jim's behavior:

- Jim is new and does not know the schedule
- The time is too short and Jim barely gets into playing in the sandbox when it is time to clean up
- Jim needs more warnings to anticipate cleanup time
- Jim does not like the activity that follows outdoor recess time
- Jim does not know why Miss Johns wants him to come with her and assumes he has done something "wrong"

## Transitions take time

- Children often spend a lot of time waiting
- Transitions can be stressful and frustrating
- Skills such as cleaning up may reduce transition times
- When children are taught what they “should be doing,” we are less likely to see problem behaviors
- Many preschool teachers consider children’s ability to independently make transitions a key skill

7

- During transition time, children often spend much time waiting (e.g., wait until everyone has finished snack, wait for buses)
- Some children (and adults) have stressful and frustrating experiences during transitions between activities (e.g., children arguing over who took out what toys and should put them away; children not knowing where to put certain toys when they are done with them)
- Skills such as cleaning up toys and lining up may reduce transition times and may lead to more time for children to become engaged in learning activities
- As children become independent and are taught what they “should be doing,” we are less likely to see problem behaviors
- Many preschool teachers and other caregivers consider children’s ability to independently make transitions between activities one of the essential skills needed in group contexts such as kindergarten and preschool.



## Before the Transition

- Plan your schedule to include a minimum number of transition times
- Consider what the children and adults will do during these times
- Provide verbal and nonverbal cues before transitions
- Teach children the expectations for the routine
- Minimize the number of transitions in which all children have to do the same thing at the same time

8

There are numerous strategies that support smooth transitions between activities.

Examples of strategies you can use before the transition:

- Plan your daily schedule to include the minimal number of transition times possible
- Consider what the children and adults will do during these times (e.g., which adult is responsible for greeting the children and who will begin looking at books on the carpet with children?)
- Provide verbal and nonverbal cues before transitions (e.g., “5 minutes ’til snack,” “It’s almost time for cleanup,” show pictures of the next activity, ringing a bell). Teach children expectations such as which shelves hold which blocks
- Minimize the number of transitions during which all children have to do the same thing at the same time (e.g., Do all children have to go to the restroom at the same time? Can some children come over to the rug and get ready for large group while others are finishing an activity?)

[http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200805/pdf/BTJ\\_Hemmeter\\_Transitions.pdf](http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200805/pdf/BTJ_Hemmeter_Transitions.pdf)





## During the Transition

- Sing songs, play word or guessing games, recite rhymes, or do finger plays with children
- Plan a gradual increase or decrease in the level of activity and a good balance of active and quiet play
- Allow children adequate time to finish activities
- Plan something for those children who finish an activity quickly so they are not waiting without something to do

9

Examples of strategies to use during the transition:

- Sing songs, play word or guessing games, recite rhymes, or do finger plays with children so that the time passes more quickly when they have to wait for long periods of time for new activities to begin
- Plan a gradual increase or decrease in the level of activity (e.g., outdoor play followed by snack) and a good balance of active and quiet play (e.g., center time followed by story time)
- Allow children adequate time to finish projects or activities so they do not become frustrated by activities ending too soon
- Plan something for those children who finish an activity quickly so they are not waiting without something to do (e.g., if some children finish cleaning up and getting to large group quickly, might they look at books while waiting for other children to finish cleaning up?)

[http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200805/pdf/BTJ\\_Hemmeter\\_Transitions.pdf](http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200805/pdf/BTJ_Hemmeter_Transitions.pdf)

## After the Transition

- Provide positive attention or feedback to children following smooth transitions
- Give very specific positive feedback after transitions



10

Examples of strategies to use after the transition:

- Provide positive attention or feedback to children during AND following smooth transitions (e.g., when children pick up toys without much prompting, tell them this shows how well they take care of their “things” and how much you appreciate their working independently)
- Give very specific positive feedback after transitions (e.g., “Nicholas and Jorge did a great job cleaning up the block area and moving to the carpet.”)

[http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200805/pdf/BTJ\\_Hemmeter\\_Transitions.pdf](http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200805/pdf/BTJ_Hemmeter_Transitions.pdf)

## Promote Independence During Transitions

- Allow children to move individually from one area to another area when they complete an activity
- Teach children to help one another
- Help children self-monitor during transitions



11

Promote independence during transitions:

- Allow children to move individually from one area to another area when they complete an activity (e.g., as children finish snack, they are encouraged to go to the carpet and choose a book; as children finish putting away their coats and backpacks, they are encouraged to get a puzzle)
- Teach children to help others (e.g., have children move as partners from one activity to another or ask one child to help another child gather his/her backpack)
- Help children self-monitor during transitions (e.g., children can be asked to think about how quietly or quickly they moved from one activity to another).

## Individualize Transition Strategies

- Provide support to children during transitions



12

Provide support to children during transitions:

- photos to help anticipate what activity is next
- directions given in a child's home language or sign language an individual warning to a child that soon it will be time to clean up and begin a new activity
- Support may need to be individualized (i.e., one child may need an adult to provide a 5-minute, 3-minute, and 1-minute warning before cleanup while the rest of the class might only need a 3-minute warning)

## Transitions and Autism

- Reduce transition time
- Increase appropriate behavior
- Less adult prompting



13

Children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) may have greater difficulty in shifting attention from one task to another or in changes of routine. This may be due to a greater need for predictability, challenges in understanding what activity will be coming next, or difficulty when a pattern of behavior is disrupted. A number of supports to assist children with ASD during transitions have been designed both to prepare children before the transition will occur and to support the children during the transition. When transition strategies are used, children with ASD:

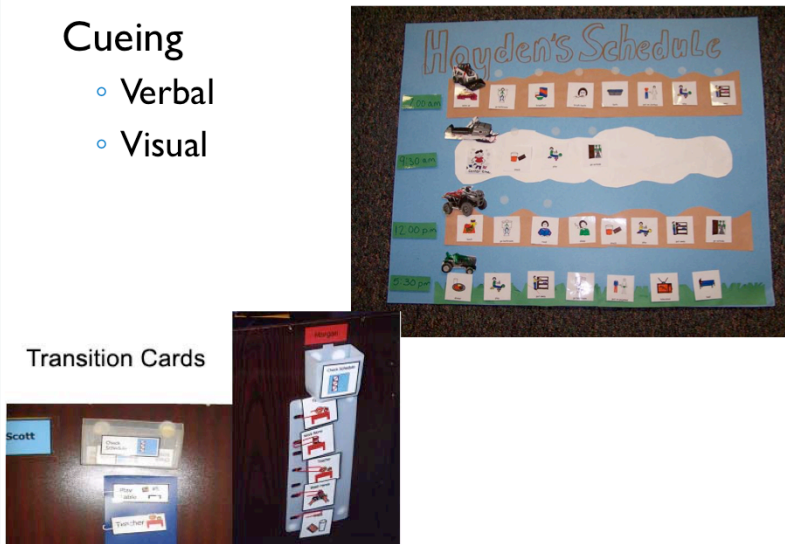
- Reduce the amount of transition time
- Increase appropriate behavior during transitions
- Rely less on adult prompting
- Participate more successfully in school

<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/?pageId=399#sthash.duEWZL61.dpuf>

## Strategies for transitioning children with ASD

### Cueing

- Verbal
- Visual



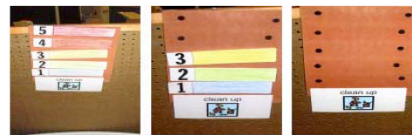
14

Cueing children with ASD before a transition is going to take place is also a beneficial strategy. In many settings a simple verbal cue is used to signal an upcoming transition (i.e. “Time to eat now”, “Put your math away”, or “Come to the carpet for circle time”). This may not be the most effective way to signal a transition to children with ASD, as verbal information may not be quickly processed or understood. In addition, providing the cue just before the transition is to occur may not be enough time for children with ASD to shift attention from one task to the next. Allowing time for children with ASD to prepare for the transitions, and providing more salient cues that children can refer to as they are getting ready to transition may be more effective.

<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/?pageId=399#sthash.duEWZL61.dpuf>

## Transitioning Strategies

- Visual timers
- Visual countdown



Visual Countdown

15

It may be helpful for children to “see” how much time remains in an activity before they will be expected to transition to a new location or event.

Presenting information related to time visually can assist in making the concepts more meaningful.

Like the visual timer, a visual countdown allows children to “see” how much time is remaining in an activity. The countdown differs, however, because there is no specific time increment used. This tool is beneficial if the timing of the transition needs to be flexible. Teachers deciding to use this strategy need to make a countdown tool. This can be numbered or colored squares or any shape or style that is meaningful to the individual. As the transition nears, the teacher will take off the top item (i.e. the number 5) so the individual is able to see that only 4 items remain. The teacher decides how quickly or slowly to remove the remaining items depending on when the transition will occur. Two minutes may elapse between the removal of number 3 and number 2, while a longer amount of time may elapse before the final number is removed. Once the final item is removed, the children are taught that it is time to transition.



## Transitioning Strategies cont...

- Visual schedules
- Use of Objects, Photos, Icons, or Words
- "Finished" Box



Visual cues during a transition can decrease challenging behavior and increase following transition demands.

Another visual transition strategy that can be used before and during a transition is a “finished” box. This is a designated location where individuals place items that they are finished with when it is time to transition. When it is time to transition it is often helpful for individuals to have an assigned location to put materials prior to moving on to the next activity. The box may be located in the individual’s work area as well as in any center of the classroom or room in the home, and can be labeled with the word or a visual cue to indicate its purpose.

<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/?pageId=399#sthash.duEWZL61.dpuf>



## Verbal Cues

- Before
- During
- After



17

Verbal cues are an absolute necessity when encouraging your child to transition from one activity to the next. Cueing should take place before, during, and after the transition. For example:

**Before:** After this tower, we'll put the blocks away so we can have lunch

**During:** Time to put the blocks away so we can have lunch

**After:** Nice job putting the blocks away! Now it's time for lunch

Of course, real life doesn't usually happen this smoothly, and that's okay. Children aren't always going to like the fact that they have to stop something that they're enjoying.

## Verbal Cues continued...

- Use verbal cues that children can understand
- Use picture schedules and cards
- Establish and maintain regular schedules and routines
- Allow for adequate time



18

**ALWAYS use verbal cues** before, during, and after a transition.

**Use verbal cues that children can understand.** Young children don't understand abstract time frames like 5 or 10 minutes. Use concrete references like, Three more times down the slide. Then, help the children count reminding them how many times are left after each turn.

Then remind the children several more times before the end of the activity.

**Picture schedules and cards can be helpful** for children who have a hard time following verbal directions. Pointing to the picture of the next activity, or handing children the picture and letting them carry it to the next activity can be helpful in transitioning. Sometimes kids simply don't understand or can't process the verbal direction alone. This technique can be particularly helpful in classroom settings.

**Establish and maintain regular schedules and routines.**

When children know what to expect and can anticipate upcoming transitions, they can maintain a sense of organization and order leading to smoother transitions.

**Allow for adequate time** for children to engage in their preferred activities without interruption.

## Routines

- Children need routine
- Daily Schedule
- Consistency



19

Children thrive in a well-ordered and predictable environment, where daily routines such as arrivals and departures, mealtimes, nap times and toileting are dealt with consistently by all caregivers. Daily routines provide opportunities for children to learn more about themselves, the world and other people. Daily routines also offer children a sense of stability, and a feeling of warmth and caring from their teachers. The challenge is to develop appropriate daily routines for children which offer them a sense of consistency and security, yet remain flexible and responsive to the individual needs of each child.

<http://www.zerotothree.org/>

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### Be On the Floor!

Created by Melissa Schneider

5, 4, 3, 2, 1

Be on the floor when I am done!

5 clap, clap, clap!

4 clap, clap, clap!

3 clap, clap, clap!

2 clap, clap, clap!

1 clap, clap, clap!

I'm DONE!



Transition times are important because they can make the day seem smooth and well-organized, or rushed and unpleasant. Allowing enough time so children make the transition gradually is the best way to avoid stressful situations. In addition to allowing a realistic amount of time for transitions to take place, it always helps to warn once in advance before a change in activities. This gives the children a chance to finish what they are doing and their cooperation is more likely. It might also help move the process along if we comment favorably about the next activity and avoid situations where all the children are expected to do the same thing at the same time.



## Resources

- <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/?pageId=399>
- [http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200805/pdf/BTJ\\_Hemmeter\\_Transitions.pdf](http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200805/pdf/BTJ_Hemmeter_Transitions.pdf)
- <http://www.pbs.org/wholechild/providers/little.html>
- <http://www.zerotothree.org/>