

Easing Transition Times in Child Care



Transition Times

Transitions are the times during the day when children are being guided from one activity to the next. Examples include:

- Moving from circle time to outside play
- Washing hands before lunch
- Moving children from one area of the child care to another
- Sitting at the table waiting for lunch
- Pick-up and drop-off times



Songs for Transition Times



For Clean-Up Times

*Clean up, clean up
Everybody, everywhere.
Clean-up, clean-up
Everybody do your share.*

*This is the way we pick up toys,
pick up toys, pick up toys.
This is the way we pick up toys
before we have our snack.*

For Circle Time

I wiggle my fingers.

I wiggle my toes.

I wiggle my shoulders.

I wiggle my nose.

*Now no more wiggles are left in me.
So I will sit as still as can be.*



For Welcoming

*If you're wearing red today,
red today, red today,
If you are wearing red today,
stand up and say "Hoo-ray!"*

For Handwashing

*Wash, wash, wash your hands.
Play our handy game.
Rub and scrub, and scrub and rub.
Germs go down the drain.*



Transition times can often be chaotic. The risks of injury are higher during times of transition. Avoid rushing children as this creates stress for the children and the provider.

Children need advance notice that transitions are going to happen. Remind children verbally and visually if possible. Give clear, simple directions to the children. Some children may have more successful transitions if they are given personal direction. For very young children, give only one direction at a time. Don't forget to let children know what will happen next and provide positive reinforcement often.

The length of the transition time needs to be kept to a minimum. Try timing from the end of one activity until the start of the next. Is it reasonable to ask a 2 year old to sit at a table so long or a 4 year old to wait that long in a line? Minimizing transition time means that child care providers need to be organized and ready for the next activity.

Make Transitions Fun

Children are more likely to respond with positive behavior to transitions that are fun and interactive. Instead of simply waiting for the next activity to occur, engage children in the transition. For example, have children sing, repeat a clapping pattern, act out finger plays, or answer questions rather than just waiting in line. Have children help initiate the transition by giving them the job of ringing a bell or flickering the lights. They enjoy having responsibility. Give children specific tasks to help, such as picking up all the red and blue blocks, someone else getting the green and yellow ones, and another child putting away the trucks. Assign daily helpers for tasks such as helping to put out nap mats or handing out napkins for lunch.

Transition periods can be learning experiences – talk about a different animal each day while children wait in line. Have each child, in order, give a word that describes the animal. They can also pretend to move like that animal when they go from one area to another.

Easing Transition Times

Questions to use to evaluate transition times in your child care:

1. Do I have too many transition times?
2. Am I reasonable with my expectations?
3. Have I allowed time in my daily schedule for transitions?
4. Do children have enough time to complete projects without being rushed?
5. Are my directions clear?
6. Do I give extra help to children who need it?
7. Do I have enough adults to make transitions go smoothly?



Other Ideas for Transitions

- Keep daily schedules predictable and boundaries well defined. Children need consistency in their lives, both at home and at child care.
- To help children transition between child care and home, schedule low-key activities close to pick up time to help children wind down.
- Provide information on transition times to parents to help them guide their children at home.
- Play a particular song just before children need to begin cleaning up or preparing for the next activity. This is a subtle, yet consistent clue to help children get ready to switch activities
- Use the buddy system and join children of differing abilities.
- Model for the children how you want them to behave or what you want them to do.
- Some children are more restless than others. Small toys for older children to fidget with can help keep their hands busy during transition times.
- Instead of having all the children move to the next activity at once, excuse children a few at a time using descriptors like clothing, hair color, etc. (e.g. anyone wearing red or wearing long sleeves may go to the table).

More Resources

In depth reference for child care staff:

Supporting Transitions: Using Child Development as a Guide - from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/supporting-transitions-brief-one.pdf>

Handout for Parents:

How to Help Your Child Transition Smoothly Between Places and Activities – from Child Care Aware of North Dakota -
https://ndchildcare.org/file_download/e65a6aec-46d9-420a-a326-777d5fddca88

Material to use for staff training on transitions:

Helping Children Make Transitions between Activities – from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning -
<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/kits/wwbtk4.pdf>

For assistance with transition times in your child care, please contact Alex Deas, Behavioral Health Specialist with Snohomish Health District's Child Care Health Outreach Program at 425.339.3535 or adeas@snohd.org.