



Tips for Terrific Transitions

Create peaceful, productive
transitions both you and the children
will enjoy!

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There may be nothing that frustrates an early childhood professional – or young children! – more than transitions from one area of the room, or from one activity, to another!

But transitions don't have to be frustrating. They can, in fact, be both peaceful and productive.

And, you might not believe me when I say this...but they can also be fun!

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The most important tip I can give you to help make your transitions terrific is to **put yourself in the children's shoes.**



The late, great Bev Bos used to talk about “childhood amnesia,” which referred to the fact that adults fail to remember what it’s like to be a child. As an early childhood teacher, you have an advantage! You went into the field because you love young children. You get to observe them all day long! That means that you understand them *better* than the average adult.



With this in mind, let's first think about what young children are *good at*. They're good at being joyful! They're good at being imaginative! Why not use their strengths to make transitions terrific, and to make them part of the children's learning experiences? For example, why announce it's snack time and then require that the children line up and walk quietly to their tables? That's boring!

But, if you link this transition to something food-related, you'll be connecting it to the content area of science. And if you ask them to *pretend*, you'll be tapping into their strengths. Following are examples of ways they can be invited to move to lunch or snack...



As though:

- Soup sloshing in a bowl
- The odor of food floating thru the air
- A fizzy drink
- Moving through peanut butter or marshmallow fluff
- Jell-O wiggling



You know they would love this! And because both their bodies and minds will be fully engaged, the transition will be peaceful and productive!



Now let's ask ourselves: What are some of the things young children are *not* good at?

In other words, what are they not yet *developmentally equipped to do*?

When I ask this question of early childhood professionals in my presentations, here are some of the most common answers I get:

- ✓ Being quiet
- ✓ Staying still
- ✓ Waiting
- ✓ Staying in a line

And what are the things we commonly do at transition time? We ask them to:

- ✓ Be quiet!
- ✓ Stay still!
- ✓ Wait!
- ✓ Stay in a line!

So, my question is: Why are we asking them to do things that we know they're simply not developmentally capable of doing?

Isn't that setting ourselves up for failure? Couldn't that be the source of the frustration?

Adults tend to believe children will never learn to wait, be still, keep quiet, and remain in a line unless we teach them how. But teaching them how doesn't mean making them do it! Nature has put a plan in place that allows these skills to *develop*. For example, believe it or not, the more children move, the more capable they become of staying still! That's nature's design. That's child development.



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The next three tips specifically address the issue of waiting...





PLAN YOUR TRANSITIONS

This doesn't mean you have to create lesson plans for them. But part of the chaos comes from the fact that we *don't* plan for them! We can't behave as though we didn't know they were coming. But we often do just that because of the false belief that transitions are something that happens *between* the learning experiences.

If you plan them as you plan other parts of your day, you'll find transitions not only more tolerable but actually pleasant!

And, aligned with planning transitions, you should...

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PREP IN ADVANCE

If children are transitioning to lunch, for example, they shouldn't have to sit at the table waiting; the meal should be waiting for the children. If a transition involves a prop or fingerplay, have it ready beforehand.

It's a good idea to have a collection of fingerplays, piggyback songs, and activities on hand for each kind of transition. They can be on index cards, in a notebook – whatever you prefer. But if you don't have to search your brain for something to do at each transition time, that means a lot less waiting for the children and therefore a lot less disruption.



Be sure the same children don't always go first, whether it's in a line or toileting or donning outerwear!

One day you can assign brown-eyed children to be first. The next day all children wearing yellow can go first, with children born in January asked to lead on the following day.

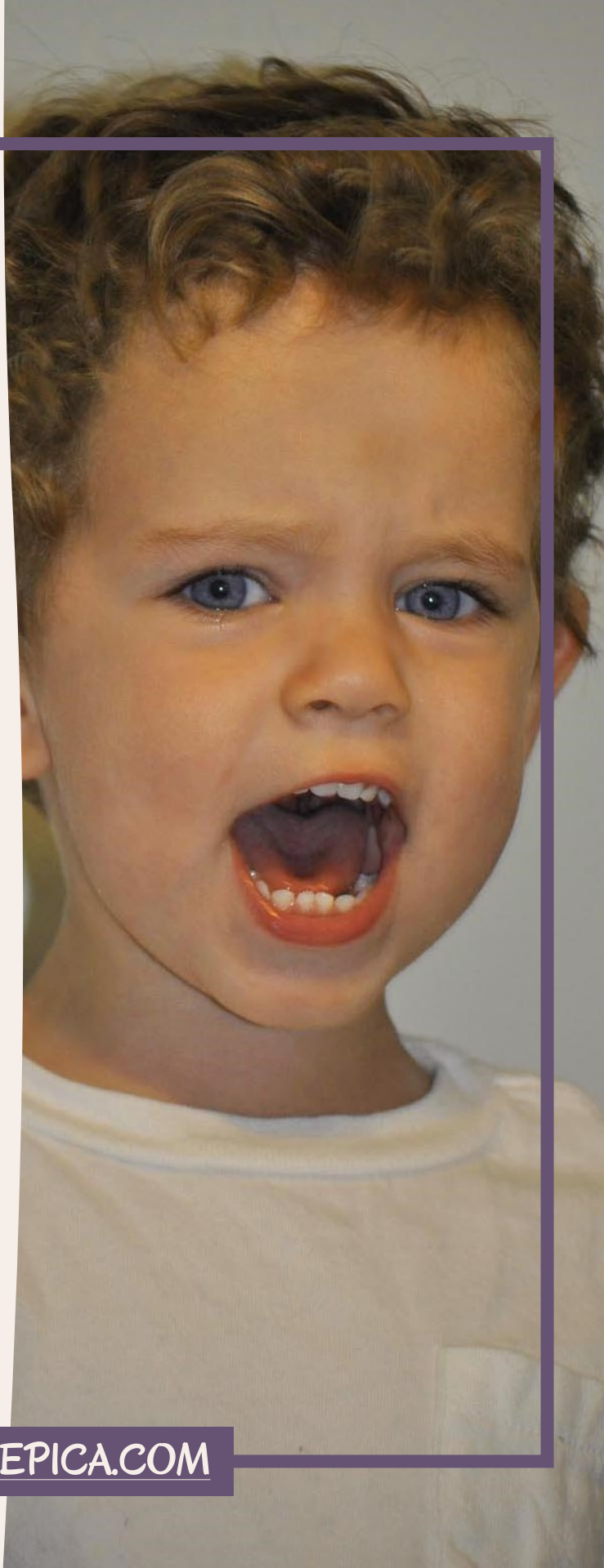
Children learn to wait their turn when experience teaches them that they'll get one!

As mentioned, *quiet* doesn't come naturally to young children. And most of the time I don't believe total silence is necessary. Active, engaged children will make some sound!

But there are times – for example, when moving down a hallway where there are other classrooms – when being quiet is the respectful thing to do.

So, if you don't want to make the children “hold bubbles in their mouths” and you don't want to shush them every few seconds (which only works in the short term), what do you do?

As with everything where young children are concerned, intrinsic motivation (the *desire* to do something for its own reward) comes when something is FUN! Here are some ideas...



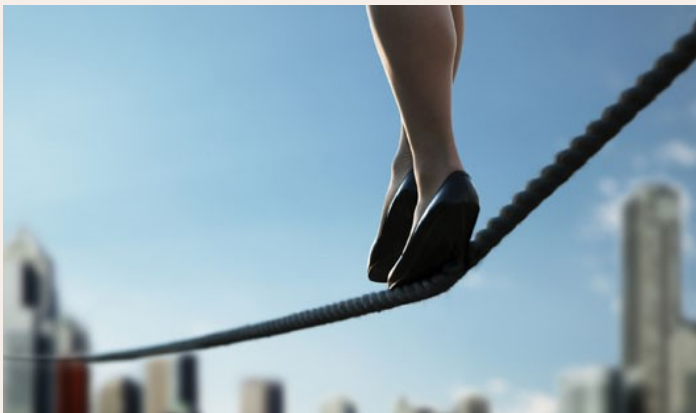
Invite the children to transition as though they are:

- A weightless astronaut
- A floating cloud
- A whisper
- Walking on eggs they don't want to break
- A giraffe
- A cat stalking a bird



Need the children to be in a line?

Once again it goes back to putting yourself in the child's shoes. Why not play a game of Follow the Leader, with you at the head of the line, tiptoeing in an exaggerated manner? The children love that sort of thing!



Or you might invite the children to imagine they're circus acrobats walking a tightrope. Both these activities will require so much concentration on the children's part – and are so much fun – that they won't need to wreak havoc!

Following are a few last, general tips...

Remain calm & collected!

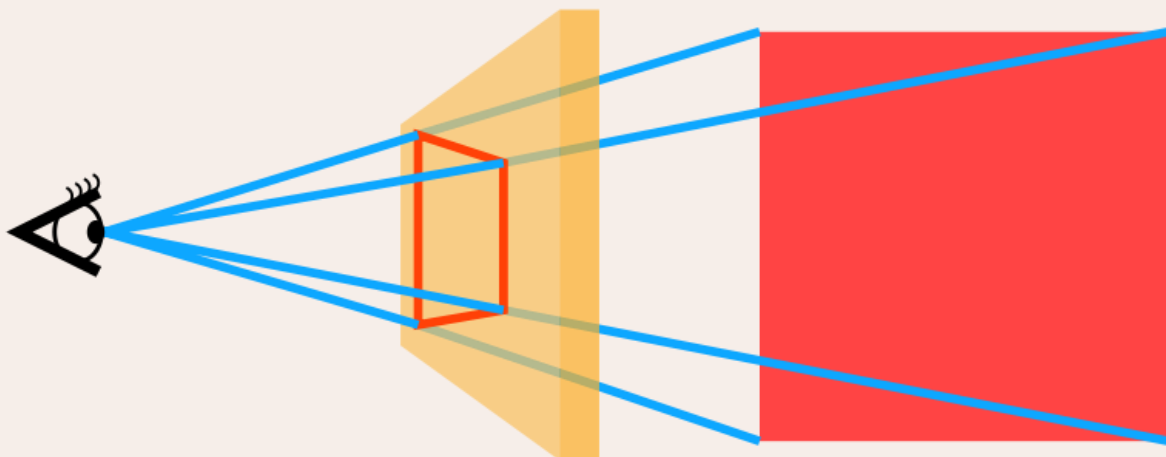


If you appear unhinged, the children will be, too.

If you move slowly and speak softly, the children will respond in kind!

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Take a different perspective!



If you think of transitions as a waste of time that could be better spent “learning,” they likely will be a waste of time!



There’s no reason why transitions can’t offer children a chance to learn something new, or to reinforce something previously learned.

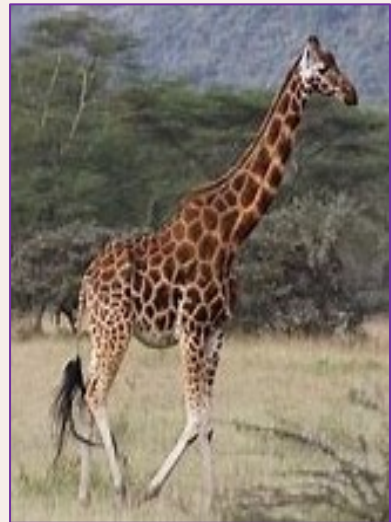
Walking on eggs that they don't want to break. Use the word *lightly* and you're connecting to emergent literacy. *Light* is also a quantitative concept, linking to math.

A weightless astronaut. The word *weightless* also involves word comprehension, and any discussion about an astronaut's profession connects to both science and social studies.

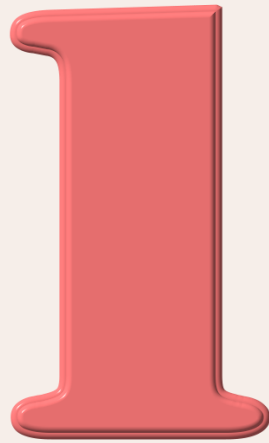
A whisper connects to emergent literacy because it is one of four ways in which we use our voices (the others being speaking, shouting, and singing).

A giraffe and a *stalking cat*, of course, are animals and therefore related to science.

Clouds floating relates to weather, which is another aspect of science.



In terms of taking a different perspective, here are two general concepts to keep in mind...



MOVEMENT IS NOT MISBEHAVIOR!

Somewhere along the line, children moving came to be seen as children misbehaving. But movement is as natural to children as breathing! It's simply what they were meant to do – until they've had enough to be able to regulate themselves.



IT'S NOT PERSONAL!

Young children want to please the important adults in their lives – and you're one of the most important! So, if they fail to comply with a request, remember that, in most cases, the children aren't *unwilling* to do the things you ask; they're simply *unable* to.

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A photograph of three children laughing heartily. In the center is a young Black boy with a wide smile, wearing a light green t-shirt. To his right is a young girl with brown hair tied back, wearing a yellow shirt and blue denim overalls, also laughing. On the left, the back of a blonde child's head and shoulder are visible. The background is a bright blue wall with some educational materials.

Testimonials for Rae's online course "Make Transitions Trouble-Free & Teachable!"

"I appreciated the tips for teaching songs and finger plays. It actually gave me insight into an issue I had....I will recommend [this course] to my colleagues!"

"I have used many of the transition ideas as I take my...classes outside or to the gym. The kids have loved them and I have so much fun with new ways of moving through the school hallways!!"

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TOO TIRED TO TEACH



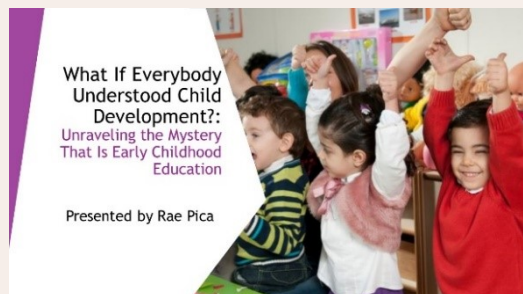
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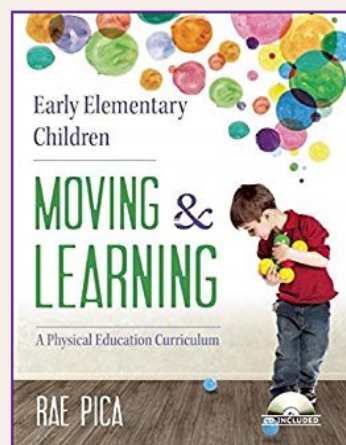
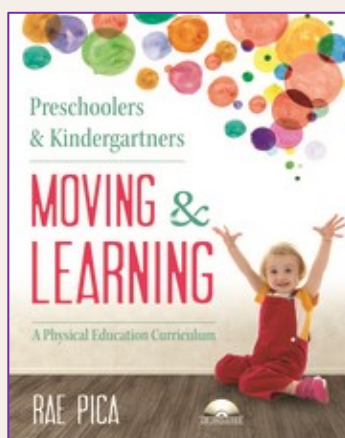
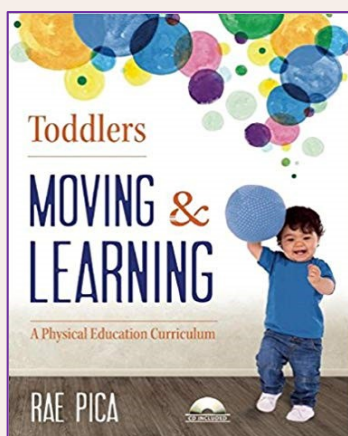
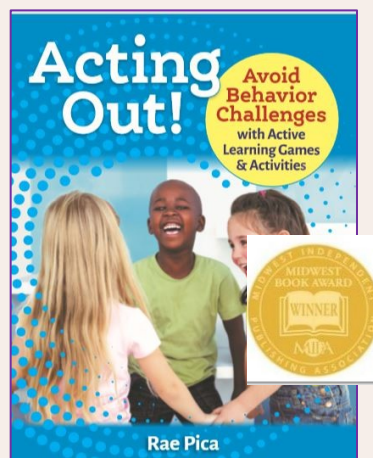
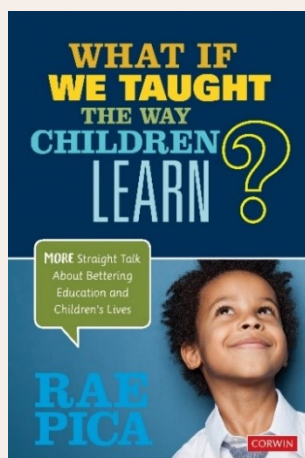
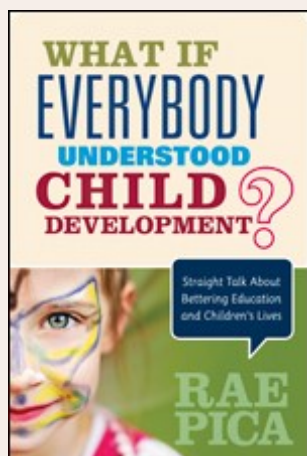


For elementary school principals & admins!

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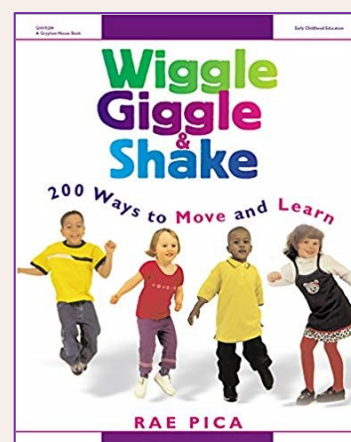
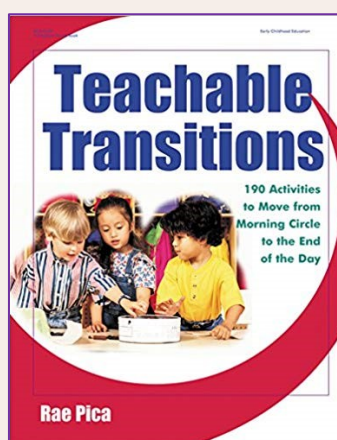
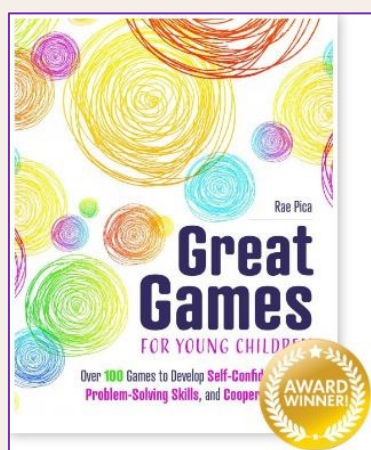
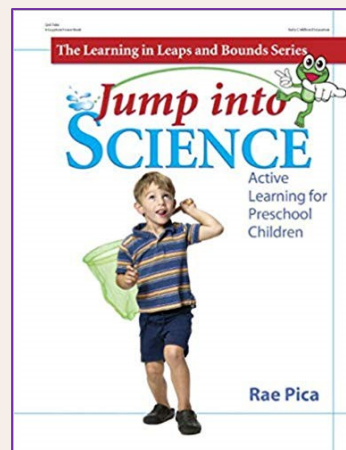
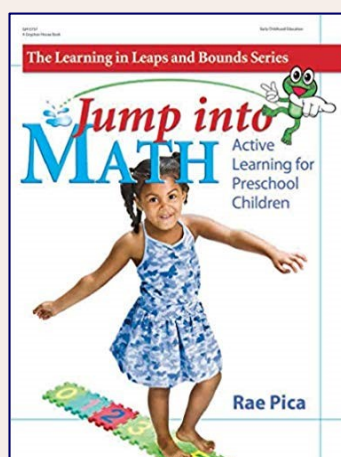
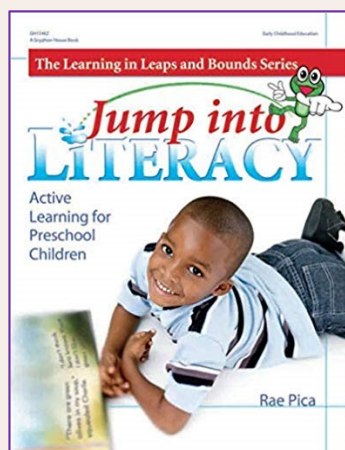
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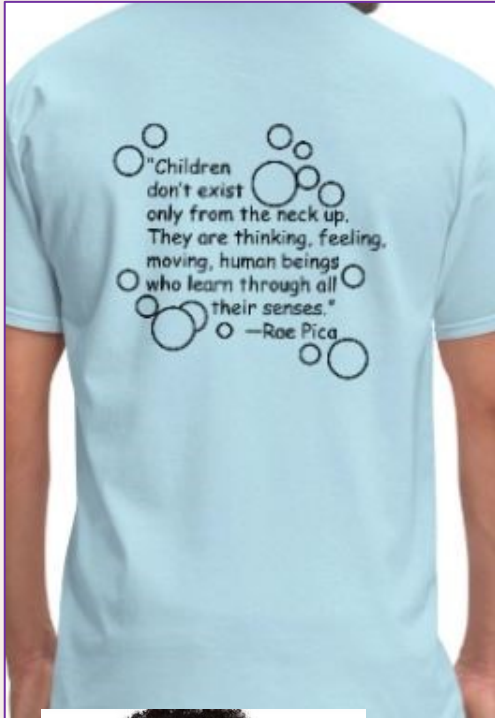
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RAE PICA



Rae has been an early childhood education consultant since 1980. Dedicated to developing and educating the whole child, she is the author of 22 books, including the text *Experiences in Movement & Music* (in its 5th edition), and two of her latest, *What If We Taught the Way Children Learn?* and *Acting Out! Avoid Behavior Challenges with Active Learning Games & Activities*.

Rae is a former adjunct instructor for the University of New Hampshire and is currently a blogger, online course creator, and popular virtual presenter. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association for Family Child Care, Eric Jensen's Learning Brain Expo, state WIC organizations, education conferences, resource and referral agencies, and schools in 46 states and Canada are among those who have invited Rae to address their groups.

As a consultant, Rae has shared her expertise with such groups as

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