



Transitions

All young children can have trouble adjusting to changes in their routines, but some children find these changes especially difficult and need a little help and practice.

Here are some ideas on how to make transitions (changes in routines) easier:

- **Create predictable routines.** Routines that follow a pattern and happen around the same time and in the same way each day, allow your child to predict what will happen next. This gives them a sense of control and helps ground them.
- **Give your child a feeling of control over transitions.** Involve your child in as many decisions or plans around the transition as you can. This helps your child feel a little more in control. Talk about possible issues and brainstorm ways to help your child cope and feel more in control (for example, letting him or her turn off the TV).
- **Give a warning before transitions take place.** “This is our last book tonight. When I’m finished reading this, it will be time to get in your bed.”
- **Notice and praise your child for successful transitions.** “You got into the bathtub the first time I asked you to. That’s awesome because now you’ll have more time to play with your bath toys!”
- **Provide information.** Explain to your child how and why things happen. Providing knowledge helps your child to cooperate!
- **Talk to your child before, during, and after transitions:** *Before:* “After you finish making the pretend pizza, we’ll put the play dough away so we can go outside.” *During:* “Time to put the play dough back in the containers so we can go outside!” *After:* “Great job putting the play dough away. Now we can go outside!”
- **Use a positive voice.** Acting like you expect cooperation helps set a good tone. When you sound stressed or pressured the chances your child will react negatively go up.
- **Listen.** Listening to your child’s frustration and objections show that you respect him or her, and encourages them to connect with you and to calm down. Listening (and expressing empathy) doesn’t mean giving in or changing a limit.
- **Acknowledge how your child feels (empathize).** Many young get more upset when they don’t believe you understand how upset they are, “I know you’re angry because we had to leave the park.”

- **Use natural transitions.** Pick your battles! Sometimes, for example, it might actually be better to let your child finish their show than to turn it off 15 minutes before it's over and cause a meltdown.
- **Distract with positives.** Keep the focus on the positives that are coming up while moving from one activity to the next.
- **Use time frames that your child understands.** Use easy to understand and concrete time examples (like five more pushes on the swing) and encourage your child to count with you.
- **Try a timer.** Explain to your child that the timer keeps track of when he or she needs to switch activities. Give your child a signal to know when the time is almost out, so they aren't surprised or rushed when it rings.
- **Be consistent.** Use the same words, timing methods and warning signals every time so that they become part of your child's routine.
- **Use rewards for good behavior.** Before a transition, explain to our child that if they are able to do what you tell them the first time, they can earn a special incentive. This incentive is a reward for good behavior, not a bribe.
- **Don't reward bad behavior.** Think about what your child gets by causing a fuss when an activity changes. Your attention? Bribes? A later bedtime? This can cause your child to think that by throwing a fit they can get what they want!