

# Supporting Transitions

## Definition:

Transition refers to changing from one activity to another (little “t” transitions). Transition also refers to moving from one stage of life to another, such as moving grade to grade, school to school or from school to community (big “T” transitions), (Fouse & Wheeler, 1997).

## Also known as:

- Bedtime Routine
- Going to school
- Birth of a sibling
- Moving to a new home

## You’re already doing it by...

- Providing an at home visual schedule
- Count down warnings, e.g. “3, 2, 1...”
- Explaining to your child what’s coming next
- Exposing your child gradually to new activities and places
- Setting a timer

Transitions are a natural part of everyday life in the home settings, including in the community. Your child is expected to adjust to changes in schedules, people, peers, buildings and routines. Children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) may have greater difficulty in shifting attention from one task to another or changes in routine which can lead to increased anxiety and challenging behaviours (Flannery&Horner,1994). With careful planning, advanced preparation and the use of transitional strategies, parents can increase the predictability and routine around transitions. (Smith Myles, 2005).

## Consider this:

Having strategies in place to support transition can: reduce the amount of time it takes for your child to transition, increase appropriate behaviour during transitions, increase your child’s independence, and increase successful inclusion in the school and community.

### Preparing Your Child for Transitions:

Preparing your child for transitions may take some planning. Some children may be able to transition easily with a verbal prompt whereas other children may require more structured support in order to transition successfully. Using visual prompts and supports during a transition may significantly decrease transition time and challenging behaviours (Schmit, Alper, Raschke & Ryndak, 2000).

### Tools Available to Aid in Transitions:

**Visual Timers** allow children to “see” how much time is left before they have to move onto another activity. It also makes the abstract concept of time more meaningful. Time Timers™, hourglass timers, oven timers and watches are examples of visual timers.

**Visual Countdowns** allow children to “see” how much time is left. This is beneficial when the timing of the transition needs to be flexible. A visual countdown tool can be any style that is meaningful to the child (Hume, 2008).

**Schedules** allow children to see what is coming next; understand a sequence of activities and increase predictability. Visual schedules used in the home setting can help decrease transition time. When using a visual schedule, it is important to assess how much information your child needs to have to transition successfully. For example, your child may transition well knowing the full day routine, while other children may need to have an activity to activity schedule. Visual schedules can be portable with children or located in a central location within your home (Hodgdon, 1995).

**First/Then** schedules allow the child to see what activity will occur next. This can be a beneficial tool to help your child complete and transition from a non-preferred activity to a preferred activity (Premack principle).

**Transition cues** are any cue found within the environment that signals that a transition is coming. For example: a bell, turning on/off lights or a singing a song (Hume, 2008).

A **Social Narrative** is a proactive strategy designed to describe social situations that are confusing or challenging for children with ASD (e.g. transitions). They are usually written by adults for a child in the form of a story and take into consideration his/her abilities and learning styles. They describe social situations identifying the *why*, *where*, *when*, *who*, and *what* that might be involved (Smith Myles, Trautman & Schelvan, 2004).

**How do I get my child to focus on a less preferred activity?** When the expectation is for your child to complete a less preferred activity, planning a preferred activity to follow can be the motivation needed for him/her to stay on task. Using visuals may help your child see what is coming next. For example, “first pajamas (less preferred), then read book (preferred item)”

## Why should I use transitional strategies?

Transitions are a large part of everyday life as we move to different activities or locations. Studies have indicated that up to 25% of a child’s day may be spent engaged in transition activities, such as move from one task to another, attending functions, and joining others for meals (Sainato, Strain, Lefebvre, & Rapp, 1987). Transition strategies are beneficial because:

- Some individuals with ASD may have difficulties associated with changes in routine or changes in environments, and may have a need for “sameness” and predictability (Mesibov et al., 2005).
- Increase a child’s independence and ability to succeed in community settings
- Have difficulty in understanding the verbal directives or explanations, including multi-step directions
- May not recognize the subtle cues leading up to a transition (i.e. parents setting the table or filling the bathtub and putting out a towel) and may not know its time to move on
- May have restrictive patterns of behaviors that are difficult to disrupt
- Children with ASD may have greater anxiety levels which can impact behavior during times of unpredictability (adapted from Partners Resource Network)

## Planning for Transition (big “T” transitions):

- Transition planning for children with ASD should begin well in advance of the expected transition. The planning should be very detailed and requires communication between schools, educators, community agencies, and parents/guardians of the child (Adapted Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

## Facilitating Major Transitions:

To Facilitate Transitions	Example
Begin preparing your child well in advance of the expected transition	-A calendar used daily to count down the days until summer -Pictures and stories of the new school or house -A video showing what will happen in a new grade/who they will meet
Plan transition steps to allow your child to gradually become familiar with the change	-Scheduled visits for your child to become familiar with the floor plan to the new school or home

*(adapted from Effective Educational Practices for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, 2007)*

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