

Supporting Children in Daily Transitions

Early Childhood
Education

Information
Brief

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Children can struggle with transitions that occur through out a typical day. This may be because they are uncertain about what will happen next and if they will like it, or because they want to keep doing their current activity. Transitions that are often difficult include going to childcare or school, stopping play for meals, and going to bed. The strategies described in this paper can be used with these transitions or others.



Transition strategies:

1. **Keep to a routine.** Children tend to do better when they have a routine that they follow. This includes getting up and going to bed at the same time, as well as the tasks that are part of activities and transitions. Make sure the routine fits the child's developmental level and individual needs.
2. **Establish a set of fun steps in any daily transition that may be a struggle.**
 - **Drop off at childcare or school.** Make it a positive experience by developing a fun leave taking routine (blowing kisses or waving goodbye through the window, singing a special song before the parent leaves, etc.).
 - Parents should be clear with their child about when they have to leave and stick to the fun routine so the child becomes comfortable with it. Talk about the fun things that will happen at the center.
 - **Getting ready for meals.** Try not to rush the child to the table. Give them a 5 minute warning that they will have to stop playing and come to eat. Give them 3 and 1 minute warnings also if they need this. Make sure they know what good foods will be part of the meal.

- **Getting ready for bed.** Have some fun activities that are part of the routine – reading books, singing songs, special bath time toys, etc. Have a routine about shutting off the lights or turning on the nightlight. Start the routine early enough so the child will not feel rushed and will get lots of parental attention, so they are not feeling like they will be missing out on fun things after they go to bed. Remind the child what fun things they will be able to do the next day after they sleep. Praise the child for following the routine.
3. **Use visual support when needed.** Visual supports are pictures or drawings that we use with children to help them see and remember steps in a task or activity. Adults use visual supports through writing lists or an appointment calendar. Since young children cannot read, we use pictures and drawings with them. An additional advantage of using pictures is that the child can independently look at the picture and be reminded of what is coming next. If we tell the child, it may be hard for them to remember what was said while they are also engaged in their current activity; but the picture can be checked whenever they want. A list of resources to make visual supports is included at the end of this document.

- **Picture schedule.** Put together pictures that show the schedule the child will follow. The schedule can be on a paper that the child can look at, posted on the wall, or put into a ring so the child can flip the picture to the next thing that will happen.



- **Picture cue cards.** The cue cards can be embedded into a picture schedule, or can be used separately. Cue cards can be a set of pictures to show the child the next activity or task to do within the transition. Show the child the picture and have the child complete the step. When all the steps are done, the child puts the pictures in the “done” spot (e.g., a little basket next to their bed for a bedtime routine, or a special pouch for traveling to childcare or school). Cue cards can be photos or drawings.



- **Scripted story.** Write a story about the transition that includes each step, and describes the good things that will happen after the transition (going to school, going home, getting ready for bed, etc.). For example, a story about the fun things that the child will do at

childcare, and how happy their parents will be to pick them up, and what they will do next (e.g., ride the bus home, have supper, visit grandma, etc.). Check out the resources section for where to read more about writing scripted stories.

Resources

Clip art for schedules and cue cards

- Do to Learn: <https://www.do2learn.com/>
- Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: <https://www.ecmhc.org/TTYC/.../FileG%20CueCards/CueCards.ppt>

Scripted stories

- Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning: <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/scriptedstories/tips.html>
- Michigan State University Extension: https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/once_upon_a_social_story_advantages_writing_and_presenting_social_stories

Routines Based Support Guide:

<https://www.ecmhc.org/TTYC/documents/Folder1TipsForms/File%20G%20Routine%20Based%20Support%20Guide/Routine%20Based%20Support%20Guide%20Rev1209.pdf>

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