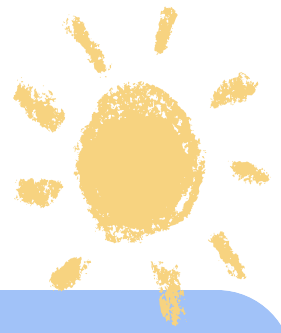


A Way of Being with Children

Practical Tools for Connection, Safety, and HOPE in Early Childhood



TRANSITIONS & CHALLENGING MOMENTS

Moving Through Change with Calm and Confidence

For young children, transitions - moving from one activity, place, or moment to another - can feel overwhelming. Their brains are still developing the ability to shift attention, manage emotions, and understand what comes next. What may seem like a simple change to an adult can feel sudden and stressful to a child. When transitions are rushed or unpredictable, children may respond with resistance, frustration, or meltdowns. These reactions are not misbehavior; they are signals that a child needs more support to adjust. Predictable routines, gentle reminders, and comforting rituals help children feel more prepared and in control. When adults guide transitions with patience and consistency, children learn that change can be manageable and safe. Over time, learning how to manage these small everyday transitional moments successfully helps children develop flexibility, confidence, and resilience - skills that support them far beyond childhood.

Skills to Practice

Prepare Children for Change. Giving children advance notice helps their brains shift from one activity to the next.

Use Visual and Verbal Cues. Clear signals such as songs, timers, or visual reminders help children understand what is happening next.

Create Comfort Through Rituals. Simple, repeated rituals make transitions feel familiar and reassuring.

Stay Calm and Connected. Children often borrow the adult's calm when change feels difficult.

Transition Songs

Clean Up Song"

Clean up, clean up,
Time to put our toys away.
Clean up, clean up,
We'll come back when it's time to play!

"Time to Change" Song

It's time to change,
It's time to go,
One more minute,
Then nice and slow.

"Hands on Top" Song

Adult: Hands on top!
Child/ren: Everybody stop!
Adult: Eyes on me!
Child/ren: One, two, three!

Songs are powerful tools for transitions because they are predictable, rhythmic, and engaging. They capture children's attention and signal that a change is coming, helping their brains shift from one activity to the next without feeling rushed or overwhelmed. Music also supports regulation, making transitions feel smoother and more playful rather than stressful.



Imagine...

Imagine you are deeply focused on a work task with no clear outline or deadline. Suddenly, your supervisor walks in and says, “Stop that now and move on to something else.” You haven’t finished your thought, you don’t know what comes next, and you have no time to prepare. You would likely protest a little, asking for more time to complete your task or perhaps some direction as to next steps. Most adults would feel frustrated, rushed, or unsettled. For children, abrupt transitions can create that same sense of confusion and loss of control.

Supporting Smooth Transitions

Give Gentle Time Warnings

This gives children time to mentally prepare. It also gives them time to complete their task and get ready to move on to the next. Time warnings let children know when a change is coming, and they can be quick, simple instructions.

For example:

“Two more minutes, then we will clean up.”

“After this page, it’s time for bed.”

Use Songs or Signals

A short clean-up song, a clapping pattern, or a bell can signal that it is time to move to the next activity.

Predictable signals make transitions feel easier and even fun. They also create a sense of safety and support as the child becomes familiar with the signal and understands the process.

Offer a Comfort Item/Transitional Object

Some children feel safer carrying a familiar object such as a small toy, blanket, or book when moving from one place or activity to another. This can create a feeling of safety, familiarity, and consistency between one task and the next.

Keep Routines Consistent

When transitions happen in similar ways each day, children begin to expect them and feel more confident navigating them. Similar warnings, the same signals, and the same support - these all create a sense of reassurance.

Acknowledge Feelings

If a child struggles with a transition, respond with empathy. Feeling understood helps children calm down more quickly. It doesn’t mean the behavior is being accepted, but rather that the emotion driving the behavior is accepted and understood.

For example: “You wish you could keep playing” or “It’s hard to stop when you’re having fun.”

You could follow this with a reminder, such as: “We can come back to play after lunchtime.”

Celebrate Small Successes

Positive feedback encourages cooperation.

Notice when children handle a transition well:

“You did your best and tried so hard.”

“You cleaned up so quickly!”

“You were ready when the song ended.”



**Scan the QR Code for
More Resources:**

