

Social Skills

Guide: Modifying Transitions and Routines – Pre-Kindergarten

What is it?

Modifying Transitions and Routines is a set of techniques used to make going from one activity to the next (transitions) and what children do each day (routines) easy and efficient. It includes ways to reduce a child's "sit and wait" or "do nothing" time and ways to create consistent routines, so children know what to do and what comes next.

What does it look like?

- During Center Time, the teachers lower the lights to get the children's attention. They say, "Five more minutes until it's time to clean up. Finish what you are working on!" After five minutes, they turn on a clean-up song and say, "It's time to clean up so we can go outside."
- As the children clean, the teachers move around the room giving cues (e.g., "Please put the blocks in the tub."). They notice and acknowledge children's behavior (e.g., "You are working hard to put the sand toys in the bin. That was helpful!").
- When children finish cleaning, the teachers direct them to stand in line. One teacher leads the children in line in fingerplays as they wait for their peers to finish cleaning.

Why is it important?

Children are more likely to show positive behavior when they *know* what they are supposed to be doing and when they spend most of their day engaged in meaningful activities. So, transitions/routines that take too long or that aren't organized and easy-to-follow typically result in challenging experiences. Purposeful activities that interest children lead to more positive times.

Example Transitions and Routines

Using cues and visuals during transitions is important to support all children in the classroom, especially children with disabilities and children engaging in behavior that you may find challenging. Here are a few examples of transitions and routines to support children in the classroom.

- **To prepare children for scheduled transitions and routines...**
 - Use a visual schedule. Review the schedule in the morning and refer to it frequently.
 - If the schedule changes, use the visual schedule to explain the change.

- **To alert children of an upcoming transition...**
 - Play a “clean-up” song or use countdowns, bells, flags, or other cues when it is time to transition to the next activity.
 - Point to the picture of the next activity on your visual schedule to remind the children of what is next.
 - **To support individual children during transitions...**
 - Provide individual reminders before the transition and use visual and verbal reminders during the transition.
 - Consider using an individualized visual schedule or a “First/Then” chart.
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Tips for Modifying Transitions and Routines

Maintain a consistent daily schedule, with set routines:

1. Plan your daily schedule: choose and determine the best order for activities.
 - Balance teacher-led vs. child-led activities.
 - Balance group vs. individual activities as well as quieter vs. louder activities.
 - Order activities intentionally.
 - For example, Music/Movement Time is great, but probably not right before a rest.
 - Consider if you have too many transitions. If you do, decide which to remove.
2. Create and use a class-wide visual schedule of your activities.
 - Display and introduce the visual schedule to the children.
 - Refer to the visual schedule frequently.
 - For example, narrate the schedule, “Now we are doing... Next is...”
 - If your schedule changes, use the visual schedule to explain and show children where and how the change is taking place.

For smooth transitions:

1. Assess the current transition(s) between the activities in your schedule.
 - Consider which transitions are currently challenging and/or too lengthy for the children.
2. Create a clear plan for your transitions.
 - Plan for it to be less than five minutes to minimize the time children are sitting and waiting.
 - Coordinate with adults about who will lead transition activities and which areas of the classroom each will monitor.
 - Choose the cues and visuals you will use (e.g., clean-up song, flags, or chimes). Be sure to consider children’s interests, cultures, and racial/ethnic backgrounds when selecting.
 - Make a plan for individual support for children that may need it during the transition.
3. Before a transition, provide a warning cue (e.g., saying, “Five minutes until clean up,” using a countdown chart).
4. When it is time to transition, use a cue or visual (e.g., lights down, clean-up song).

5. Give *one* instruction at a time (e.g., “clean up the blocks,” or “line up,” rather than, “Clean up your area, then take a drink, get your coat, and line up for recess.”).
 6. Notice and acknowledge children for displaying specific expected behaviors during transitions.
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Resources That Support Modifying Transitions and Routines

- [Transition Visual Cards](#) - NCPMI ©
- [Schedules and Routines](#) – Head Start ©