



Pathways to Success

Helpful Strategies for Parents and Caregivers of Young Children

Help with Transitions

Young children often have difficulty with transitions. A transition is a change from one activity to another; for example, saying goodbye to a parent when being dropped off at daycare, or stopping play outside to come in for a snack.

Here are some tips to help children make transitions more easily:

- Use pictures. Create a “visual schedule” of the events in a child’s day and review the pictures with them regularly. If there are changes in the schedule, such as a special visitor, let the child know in advance and use the visual schedule. For example, make a picture of the special event and show the child when it will happen.
- Let children know what is happening and when by using a “first-then” statement. For example, “First we are going to play outside, and then we are going to have a snack.” Show pictures when possible. You can also take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle. Put a picture of the first activity on the left and a picture of the second activity on the right. Show it when starting the first activity so the child knows what to expect when the first activity is done.
- Use a visual timer to show how much time is left in an activity, and let the child know when the end of the activity is approaching.
- Try not to stop when a child is in the middle of an activity. For example, if a child is coloring a picture, try to wait until he/she is finished coloring. If it is not possible, have a special “save for later” box where you can put things to come back to later.
- Try taking part of the toy a child was playing with to the next activity, or bring the new activity to the old activity area so the transition involves less movement. This gives the child a better idea of what is happening next. You can also try having a special item as the transition toy. For example, if a child has a hard time transitioning into the car, have a fun toy that is only used in the car. This gives the child something to look forward to, even if the car isn’t his/her favourite place.
- Be consistent in your communication around transitions. For example, turn the lights off and then back on to let a child know there is five minutes before clean-up time, or play a clean-up song.
- Give choices about the next activity. For example, “It is time to clean up now for snack. Do you want apples or oranges for snack?”
- Focus on the fun or choice in the next activity instead of focusing on the activity that is ending.
- Give children time. Young children often need time to understand a change is about to happen. Give the child time to think about it, then repeat the instructions, check they understand and wait for the child to respond.