

**Planning for Transitions**  
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**Planning for transitions, especially for transition-sensitive kids**  
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**Planning for transitions - especially for transition-sensitive kids**

- Many kids are extra sensitive to transitions and need special help.
- Usually this involves some form of helping them envision the upcoming transition.
- Often needs to include details or a visual cue or both.
- Can be as simple as a reminder – We are leaving in 15 minutes. Remember that means getting on your boots and bringing your lunch and backpack to the car. This often is not enough with transition sensitive kids.
- Can involve a choice. *Do you want to leave your friend's house in 10 minutes or 15 minutes? Do you want to put your backpack on or do you want me to carry it to the car?* See next section.
- Can involve a cue that isn't you reminding them – e.g. set an egg timer, set an alarm on their cell phone.
- Often involves planning ahead to minimize stress – laying out clothes the night before on the floor in the shape of a person, choosing lunch items or making the lunch the night before.
- Often involves planning further ahead with chronic transition problems.
- Talking about the transition (e.g. going back to preschool or school after a break, going back to other parent's house with divorced parents) **a day or even several days ahead of time**. Pick a quiet time. Ask them what they remember. *Do you remember what time we get up in the morning? Do you remember what you have to do each morning? Do you remember what you need to bring to Daddy's house? Do you remember what your room looks like at Daddy's house?* Ask them how they feel about the transition?
- Think about visuals – A chart with all of the details of getting ready each morning or getting to bed. A self made book of what it is like at the other parent's house (e.g. *On Friday after preschool, Mommy picks me up and we go to her house for dinner. I have my dinosaur bedspread on the bed there. I have my green*

*toothbrush there. I always see my half-sister Sara there. We go to karate class Saturday morning.)*

- Think about using touch and physical guiding (gentle, but firm) – a hand on the shoulder saying *pajama time* works better with more kinesthetic kids than multiple reminders.

### **By passing power struggles with Choices - Give children control you don't need by allowing lots of choices about small things – Good for all ages**

- Give a choice about when or how rather than if – *Would you like to get things ready for school tomorrow before or after dinner? You can do one more thing at the playground – swings or slide?*
- Can be a miracle for engaging cooperation at bedtime or during the morning hassle – *Would you like to brush your teeth first or get on your pajamas first? Would you like to get on your clothes or eat breakfast first? Would you like to put on your pants or your top first?*
- Gives small kids some control – *Are you in the mood for your red pants or your blank ones? Would you like apple juice or orange juice? Do you want to blow your horn in the bedroom or find a quieter activity out here? Left sock first or right (kissing their toes)?*
- Give older kids bigger choices – *Here is the list of what we have to do today in Montrose – what order shall we do them? We have \$20 for fun – how would you like to spend it?*
- Make sure you are okay with both choices and will be happy no matter what.
- Give 90% of choices when things are calm and happy. This prevents problems. Once a problem has begun, often need another strategy.

### **Empathy and Accepting Feelings**

- Accept feelings, but not behavior – *It is hard to go to bed when the grown ups are up. Do you want to kiss everyone goodnight first or get your pjs on first? This can lessen resistance. Sometimes it increases arguing instead. Experiment.*
- Give them their wishes in fantasy – *I wish we could stay all day at your friend's house and bake ten more batches of cookies and eat them all up – Yum. Do you want to have one more now before we go or take it in the car?*
- Try naming the feeling or desire. *You are really upset about having to leave now, huh? You really hate brushing your teeth each morning, I know. You wish you could play some more instead of going to pre-school. Okay – time to go.*
- Say yes, but later. *Yes, we can do that when you get back from pre-school.*

**Enforceable Statements - Good for enforcing routines and clean up, where there is chronic resistance and you've tried other things like planning ahead and choices and empathy.**

- Tell them what you will or won't do rather than what they should do.
- Tell them only once and nicely. Tone is everything. Kind, but firm.
- Involves thinking about logical consequences. If we don't brush our teeth, we can't have dessert because it is bad for our teeth. If we don't get ready on time, we have to go the way we are. We have to do fun stuff (TV, computer etc) after responsibilities (cleaning, getting ready).
- *I'll be leaving in 5 minutes. You may come with your clothes on or your clothes in a bag (You are in control of when the car pulls out of the driveway). You have to be okay with them going in pajamas or find another idea.*
- *I'll be happy to drive you to ballet/Kindermusic/soccer as soon as your room is cleaned up (You are in control of whether you will drive). Have to be okay with missing a desired activity or find another idea.*
- *We'll be leaving the restaurant in 5 minutes. Get as much as you need of your lunch to hold you until dinner. (You are in control of when you leave and what food you will offer before dinner. Can allow a limited selection of "always okay" foods like bananas or cheese that children can get themselves, but not be willing to make another meal if kids are hungry). You have to be okay with not offering more food until next snack or okay with limited "get it yourself" foods or find another idea.*
- *Feel free to watch TV as soon as your clothes are laid out for tomorrow. Have to be okay with denying TV time (or computer time) until responsibilities are completed or find another idea.*
- *Treats after dinner are for kids that brush their teeth in the morning. I only ask once. (You are in control of giving out treats). You have to be okay with withholding treats or find another idea.*
- **FOLLOW THROUGH** and do it nicely. *I see you have decided to bring your clothes in a bag (leading them firmly by the hand). You chose not to have dessert tonight when you didn't brush your teeth in time this morning. You'll have another chance tomorrow.*
- **Be sad for them if they are unhappy with the results.** *I know you're sad about no dessert. I'm sad for you, too. It is hard to learn to remember with only one reminder. I bet you'll do great tomorrow.* Sadness lets the consequences do the teaching. Otherwise, they will remember only your anger. Don't be angry or lecture. Don't say – "I hope you learned your lesson". Again, tone is everything.
- Kids catch on quickly after an initial period of being unhappy.
- Usually makes sense to do this primarily with one or a very few targeted, problem behaviors or else starts to feel overly controlling.

## **Family Meetings to problem solve chronic problems with your kids**

- You can begin these as early as 3, although you will need to really guide the process. By 4, many kids can make constructive suggestions on their own, but will still need structure.
- Gives kids a sense of control and being included in decisions and often results in ideas that you wouldn't have thought of.
- Pick a time when you aren't pressured or angry.
- Start with appreciations. Each person gives someone else in the family (or the whole family) a compliment or an appreciation.
- State the problem to be worked on. (Getting to preschool or school on time – It is important and nothing we have tried works).
- Talk about the child's feelings and needs (*How do you, Bobby, see this problem? How do you feel when the problem occurs?*), until you understand them, and the child understands that you understand them – don't assume you already know. Listen for hidden feelings and information. It may emerge that they dread preschool, that they feel overtired in the mornings, etc.
- Talk about your feelings and needs (keep concise, no lecture or tirades). *I feel hassled when I ask everyone to get ready several times and it doesn't happen. Getting to school on time is important.*
- Brainstorm solution (no evaluating, no editing, all ideas welcome) – Consider all ideas no matter how far out or wacky.
- Write down all ideas (still no evaluating or editing)
- Cross out things that absolutely won't work for one of you – No put-downs. Avoid persuading, lecturing or convincing. *That won't work for me* is enough. If everything gets crossed out (usually it doesn't), ask if someone wants to reconsider or if we need new ideas.
- Decide on a plan, along with follow through (what steps, when, who will do what). Ask the child to repeat the plan back to you. Ask for details, such as *When exactly will this be done each night before school? Before dinner? After dinner?*
- May very likely need to revisit the problem. Many solutions to chronic problems work only for awhile.
- May include a discussion of consequences if it doesn't work or there is no follow through. Make it positive, however, not a lecture or threat.
- End with a special family activity – a game or a treat.

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