

TRANSITIONS, NOT TANTRUMS: *Helping Resistant Students Move Between Daily Activities*

Many behavior problems erupt when a student transitions from one activity to another, one area to another, or if there is an interruption or change in the daily routine. Transitions for many children with autism, mental retardation and/or other neurological disabilities are anxiety provoking passages into the unknown. Employing transition items, either objects or photographs, to assist in clearly communicating what the next activity will be can markedly reduce anxiety and behavioral problems.

Selecting Transition Items

Depending on the student's overall developmental level, objects, photographs, drawings, or words can be used. Examples of transition objects might include:

<u>Object</u>	<u>Area/Activity</u>
Ball	Playground/recess
Milk carton	Cafeteria/meal
Plastic hamburger	McDonald's/eating out
Tape	Tape player/music listening
Toy	Leisure/free time
Backpack	Go to school/home

If the student recognizes photographs, pictures can be substituted for the objects:

1. Take clear photographs of the day's activities. To provide additional contextual clues, the photos should be of the actual location or object, rather than a professionally photographed, generic "thing" floating in a colored backdrop limbo. It may be helpful to include the student in the photo as a reminder that he's "been there, done that" previously.
2. Place the photos in a small, inexpensive album. This album should be the type which displays one photo per page.
3. Sequence the photos in the album so that they reflect the student's schedule.
4. Review his schedule in the morning using the photographs. This presents an opportunity to warn the student of an impending schedule change: remove the "old" photo, and insert the "new" one. Talk to the student about the new event.

If the student recognizes drawings, small icons can be used instead of photographs. Write simple descriptors under the photos or drawings (e.g., "recess," "music"). Repeated pairings of the word with the activity and the photograph or drawing may teach functional recall/reading of those words.

Photos or drawings of reinforcers could also be helpful. The student could choose his reinforcer prior to starting an activity, and the picture could be placed by his work area as a reminder. During the task, the adult could redirect the student by using the photo; e.g., “We’re working for (reinforcer). First (task) then (reinforcer)”;

for example: “We’re working for the blue truck. First fold towels, then blue truck.”

How to Use Transition Items

When a student moves between activities and/or areas, show him an item that clearly represents the area or activity to which he is moving. At the same time, verbally tell the student what is going to happen next: “Dan, we are going out to the playground,” while handing him a ball or showing him a picture. One item should be consistently paired with each activity or area so that the item will gain communicative significance. It is important to keep the verbal input short, simple, and consistently use the same words (for example, do not alternate between “playground,” “recess” or “outside to play”).

- A. Start transitioning with the simplest, most established routine (e.g., going to snack). Add objects for other routines as they are established.
- B. If the transition is geographically or temporally lengthy, allow the student to carry the object, or “remind” the student where or what he is going to do next, during the transition period, by showing him the object and repeating the verbal cue.
- C. If an activity is a long one, or if it is “non-preferred,” then it may be helpful to remind the student of the next activity to be anticipated by using an object or picture, kept in sight.
- D. For this transition system to become effective, it needs to be used consistently, and across all environments.

Strategies to Transition a Very Resistant Student

Some students have such a dramatic resistance to change or transitioning that it is difficult to get them to stop one activity and move onto another. If the student resists a transition, after communicating as clearly and effectively as possible by using comprehensible language paired with concrete referents, attempt to use **closure** as a first intervention for prompting the transition. If it is possible to visually end the task (having the student put things away or finish the last item of an activity) do so. If that technique does not work, use one of the items being used by the student as a **transition object** to the next setting/activity (e.g., taking a toy from the play area to the work table). If that is not possible, engaging the student in an immediately available activity or action (different toy, a quick tickle, getting a drink of water, going for a walk, etc.) can serve as a powerful enough **stimulus change** to allow for an eventual successful transition to the next activity. As the student experiences and is taught the sequence of the activities that comprise his day these transition issues will lessen. Consistent refusal to transition to a particular activity may indicate that the student finds that activity difficult and/or uninteresting. Intervention should then be geared to reducing stress within and/or increasing the motivation for that activity.