

Tip Sheets

Children with Special Needs: Transitions

Change is a challenging concept for many, and young children are no exception. When a young child is expected to make a change from one activity to the next, or from one setting to the next, we as adults can prepare them for that adjustment.

Steps to Prepare for a Transition

1. Visualize the process and what needs to happen to experience success.
2. Gather the necessary items for that success. This includes transitional objects, tools, supports, and a plan.
3. Articulate the plan to all involved.
4. Prepare the child through the use of visual supports, a transitional object, peer partner, and/or staff support.

Planning and Preparation

Preparing for a transition is key to success. Prior to a change, such as a classroom change or a schedule change, it is important to walk through the process in your mind or on paper. Determine the steps that need to occur before the transition takes place.

For example, you are planning to go to the park and bring a snack with you. A child in your care usually eats using a certain plate with higher edges and special-built adaptive silverware. You want to be able to have snack at the park more than once so you may ask the child's parents if they are able to share another plate as a "picnic set" so that it can stay in the back pack for future park visits.

Consistency

Routine and clear expectations support success for all children, and especially for those with unique learning and social needs. Planned and structured transitions are a helpful part of a successful daily routine, which in turn, provides a consistent foundation for all learning throughout the day.

For example, cleanup is one such transition. When preparing for cleanup, you could signal the children to prepare for the transition with one preparatory sound or picture. Choose trigger sounds such as music, a song, or a bell to denote a regular transition, and/or use a visual such as a picture of the next activity.

When it is time to make the transition, give the child a bucket and also a clear task, such as "Josie, you are in charge of picking up the yellow blocks and putting them in the bucket."

Developmentally Appropriate Expectations

Be aware of the skills of children when planning a schedule. Know the child's developmental level, and frame your transitions using that information.

Ask yourself:

- Are all of the transitions necessary?
- Are you asking children to shift gears too often during their day?
- Would allowing for longer times between transitions give children more time to learn through their play?

When we keep all these things in mind we will see greater success for children in our setting. They will feel a sense of security and predictability that brings calm to their day. This allows them to explore and learn without anxiety about what is happening next.

Additional Resources

National Association for the Education of Young Children

<https://www.naeyc.org>

Center for the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning

<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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