

Snagglebox

Autism resources & support

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18 Tips To Make Transitions Easier

by Bec Oakley



In part one we looked at reasons [why transitions can be difficult for some kids](#), now let's figure out how to help.

1. Break it down

Do a task analysis to break the transition into smaller steps, so you can figure out where the problem is. Let's take moving from computer time to another activity as a quick example:

Step	Possible Issues
1. Playing computer game	Does it make him feel frustrated? Happy? Over-excited?
2. Computer time is over	How does he know? Does he get any warning?
3. Leaving the computer	Is the game still running? Is there a routine for leaving?
4. Moving to the next activity	Does he know where to go? Can he still hear the game?
5. Starting the next activity	Does he know what to do? Does he have what he needs?

2. Show that change can be okay

Use two activities that he loves equally and practice switching between them. Teach him to recognise what a transition is, when it's coming and how it will feel. Make it a rewarding, stress-free time so he can focus on learning the cues and experiencing the change as a pleasant thing.

3. Ease into it

Sometimes making a transition less obvious, by blurring the lines between activities or making the steps between them smaller, can help close a gap that feels too intimidating to cross. Let him bring toys from the floor to the kitchen table while you make breakfast, then put them away when his cereal is ready. Switch from fleecy trackpants to long cargo shorts and socks before making the move to short summer pants.

4. Be prepared

But you already knew this one. The best way to cope with transitions is to know that they're coming. Get into the habit of thinking about the plan for the day, the week, the month ahead and identify times of transition in advance.

5. Use a schedule

This is one of the most important tools for helping autistic kids to deal with change of any kind. Listing the activities for the day will help him to know what to expect, show the sequence of events and highlight times of transition.

6. Make the end obvious

Moving on to a new activity is difficult if you don't realise that the old one is finished. Find ways to make it clear when a task is over - pull the picture from the schedule and put it in a 'completed' basket or have photos of what the finished task looks like.

7. Use transition cues

Give plenty of warning that a change is coming, using tangible signals that are clear, obvious and unique to each transition - play Bob the Builder theme music when it's time to pack up at the end of free play, count down numbers on the whiteboard for the last ten minutes before recess.

8. Avoid verbal prompts

Auditory processing isn't an area of strength for a lot of autistic kids, so opt for visual or physical prompts instead - a tap on the leg when it's time to stand up, painted footprints on the ground to show him where to walk.

9. Use a timer

Time is a really abstract concept, so translating it into something visual will help signal that a transition is coming up. The best ones show time passing in some concrete way, like this [visual timer](#) where time 'disappears' as it counts down.

10. Define physical areas and boundaries

Moving between tasks becomes easier when it's clear where to go and what to do there - mark a spot on the floor for him to sit at mat time, show him on a map the spots where he can play during lunchtime.

11. Teach transition words

Before you can start to communicate with kids about transitioning, they need to understand concepts like first, then, after, next, now and later. Use the words often and play simple games to reinforce these ideas...

- First you roll the ball to me, then I roll it back to you
- Now we're watching Thomas, after we'll bake cookies
- Your brother is first in the bath and then you're next
- You can have a drink after you wash your hands
- Let's line up the toys... Teddy is first, Nemo is next, Spiderman is last

12. Teach tangible time

Understanding time is more than just being able to read numbers off a clock. Giving kids a feel for how long five or ten minutes is will be more useful in helping them prepare for a coming transition than telling them it happens at 10:30.

Show them what five minutes looks like on the timer, and watch it countdown together. Time yourselves doing stuff like walking around the entire classroom or eating a sandwich. It's also a good chance to make use of obsessions - talk about how long a Spongebob episode is or their best lap time on Gran Turismo. That way, the next time you give a five minute warning ahead of a transition you can say "that's about as long as...."

13. Use a transition object

Having an object that he can take from one activity or place to the next can help ease the stress of the transition in a number of ways:

- Smooths the line between activities - taking a CD from home into the car
- Increases predictability - every time he gets a paintbrush it's time for art class
- Provides comfort - holding something familiar makes the new stuff less scary
- Cues the next activity - carrying a photo of the room he needs to go to
- Signals the end of the transition - placing the photo in a box at the destination
- Acts as a reference - holding a book reminds him he's walking to the library
- Helps with comprehension, especially if receptive language delays make it hard for him to understand your instructions

14. Allow plenty of time

The process of disengaging, switching focus and re-engaging can take longer for autistic kids so don't rush the transition. Hypersensitive bodies might also need time to adjust to the onslaught of new sensory information.

15. Watch for signs of stress

Nobody is at their best when they're having trouble coping, so know the signs and keep an eye out for them - intervene early to provide more supports or reduce sensory input.

16. Make social stories

Transitions can often be stressful because they involve moving from something safe and familiar to something new and scary. So make the unknown familiar by introducing it in advance in a visual storyboard. Explain when the change will happen, how he will know when it's time for the old activity to end and what the new activity will be.

17. Practise disengaging

The first step in shifting attention - disengaging from the current activity - is often difficult for autistic kids and is one of the reasons transitions can be so hard for them. It also impacts things like the ability to notice what's going on around them and social interaction, so it's an important skill to work on.

The trick is to find rewarding reasons for them to stop paying attention. Keep computer games at the opposite end of the room to the computer so he has to stop playing to get a new game. Hold onto the puzzle pieces so he has to stop and look at you each time he wants a new piece.

18. Avoid them

The easiest way to manage transitions is to minimise the number that he has to experience. He'll be less stressed and much more able to cope - and so will you. Figuring out ways to avoid transitions is actually pretty easy, the tricky part is planning ahead so you can identify when they're coming.

Map out your day and highlight transition times, then cut out as many as you can. If your hypersensitive kid doesn't like changing clothes, don't make him

get into afternoon clothes after school - change straight into pyjamas or let him wear his uniform to bed. Get his siblings to meet you at the car after school so you don't have to take him in and out of his carseat. Embrace the workaround!



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