

# Transitions to and from Child Care: Making Them Less Stressful

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The picture in your mind has you enjoying breakfast with your child before heading calmly out to work and to child care.

The reality you face has you running late (again) as your child refuses to put on his shoes and you search for your keys.

There are strategies to make the transition to and from child care easier. Start by looking at what's happening. Then look at your behavior and look at the environment. Finally, look at your child's behavior.

**Take a couple of days and don't do anything except look at how transitions are working out.**

Starting with the time you get up in the morning, write down what is happening every 15 minutes. Then note what is working and what needs to change. Think about what the chart shows you. What can you do to prevent problems and prepare yourself and your child for transitions?

**Parents have found the following strategies helpful in preventing problems:**

- Give yourself five minutes of quiet before you wake up your child or start your day.
- Think about what you know about your child. What will help make the morning more pleasant? The following ideas may work for you:
  - Cover your child with an extra blanket five minutes before you wake him up.
  - Play calming music.
  - Put a glass of orange juice on your child's night stand so she can get sugar into her system right away.
  - Turn the light on in the room five minutes before waking your child.
  - If your child enjoys tickling, use that as a strategy to wake him or her in the morning. It makes waking up fun!
  - Plan to give the slow-to-wake up child three wake up calls.
  - Put happy, sad, relaxed, and tense faces on the refrigerator. Have your child point to how he feels in the morning. Point to how you feel. Use this information to give hugs or to be quiet.

- Get things ready the night before:
  - Put out clothes, shoes, coats, and gloves.
  - Set up breakfast.
  - Pack backpacks.
  - Find your keys.
- Create clear and consistent rituals:
  - Make a chart with pictures showing what should happen. Instead of nagging your child, point to the chart.
  - Follow "Grandma's Rule" about TV and video games. "When you get done with . . . , then you can . . . "
- Keep it simple. Use shoes without laces and pants without belts until your child is really good at tying shoes and buckling belts.
- Have a distraction bag to use in the car or while your child has to wait. Include small books, action figures, squeeze balls, washable markers and notepads, small dolls, masking tape, stickers, small cars and trucks.

### **Prepare your child for successful transitions**

- Children don't have the same sense of time that adults do. Five minutes can seem like nothing or an eternity. Give your child something concrete to measure the time: "After this song is over..." "When the timer goes off..." "After you sing 'Happy Birthday' twice..."
- Your child may not have the skills to do what you want. Preschoolers can throw a quilt over a bed, but it's hard for them to tuck in the blankets.
- Make sure your child knows how to do what you want. Instead of just saying, "Make sure the bathroom is clean," show your child how you want the bathroom to look. Then have your child show you how to hang up the towel, put the toothbrush away, and wipe the counter.
- Show respect. Your child may be involved in what he or she is doing, or may have other plans about how to spend the time. Your child has to do what you need done, and you want it done pleasantly. That doesn't mean your child has to like doing it.
- Give your child responsibilities. Teach your child to get dressed, fix breakfast, and tidy up. Compliment your child when things go well.
- If you still have a problem, practice doing the tasks together with your assistance, and then leave your child to do them.
- Work with your child to plan how to solve on-going problems.

### **Plan for successful transitions to your child care program**

- Leave your child with the same caregiver every day.
- Tell your caregiver about significant things happening at home that are important to your child.
- Plan to arrive at the child care program about the same time every day. That way your child can plan ahead and think about what will be happening when you get there.
- Have a good-bye ritual so your child knows you are leaving. Tell your child when you will be back (for example, after nap time and group play.)

- Keep your time at the child care program short. A child who knows you are going to leave can't begin to relax until you really do leave.
- Trust your child care provider to help your child settle down once you leave.
- Leave a picture, a scarf with your scent, or some other "lovey" in your child's cubby so that your child will have it when he or she needs reassurance.

### **Plan for successful transitions from child care to home**

- Take a couple of days and don't do anything except chart how the afternoon transition is working out. Think about what the chart shows you. What can you do to prevent problems and prepare yourself and your child for the transition from child care to home?
- Take time to relax before you pick up your child.
- Try to arrive about the same time every day. Children seem to have an internal alarm clock and know when to expect you.
- Find out from your caregiver what happened during your child's day.
- Have a simple snack ready for the ride home.
- Plan to have time with your child as soon as you get home.
  - Some children will need 100 percent of your attention when you get home. They are charged up from being around people all day. They need to talk to unwind. Plan to give them your attention for 10 minutes and listen.
  - Other children will need to have time away from everyone after a day of being in a crowd. Give them time to be by themselves when they get home. Plan to give them 10 minutes to talk with you at the end of the day.
- Give your child a nutritious snack to hold him or her over until you get dinner ready. (Think of it as part of dinner - one parent calls 5:00 p.m. "the vegetable hour.")
- Plan calming activities for your child while you prepare dinner. Let your child help you with dinner, read, play with play-doh, play in water, color, play with a basin of rice, watch fish in a fish tank, snuggle into a beanbag chair, or listen to relaxing music.

TV and computer games can help distract children during transitions, but children may have trouble transitioning from these activities back into your world.

Encourage everyone to get enough sleep, eat well, and exercise.

### **For More Information**

Your Local Library offers a wealth of material on how to choose books that will interest your child while you are busy.

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