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Transition Time Tricks

By Jean R. Feldman, PH.D.

Stand up! Sit down! Clean up! Calm down! Hurry up! WAIT! Too many transitions in the day can be frustrating for children as well as teachers. But it doesn't have to be that way. With careful planning and a few "tricks," your day can move more smoothly and many behavior problems can be avoided. And the good news is that transitions provide a great time to "exercise" children's grains. Children love music; they love to move and they love surprises—the very activities that stimulate children's brains according to recent brain research (Wolfe, 1996).

Circle Time

By following the same schedule every day, children learn what to expect and program in certain behaviors (Jensen, 1996). 'Indicator' songs are an effective way to let children know when they are about to begin a new activity. Try these tunes to gather children for circle time or to start the day:

"Hello Song"
(Tune: "Skip to My Lou")

*Hello, How are you?
Hello, How are you?
Hello, How are you?
How are you this morning?
(Wave hand.)*

*I am fine and I hope you are, too.
I am fine and I hope you are, too.
I am fine and I hope you are, too.
I hope you are too this morning.
(Point to self, then a child)*

*Turn to your neighbor and shake their hand.
Turn to your neighbor and shake their hand.
Turn to your neighbor and shake their hand.
Shake their hand this morning.
(Shake hands with children.)*

(Continue singing the song by inserting children's names. For example, "Hello Carla, how are you? Hello Peter, how are you? Hello Kia, how are you? How are you this morning?")

Review your schedule each morning and involve children in planning with a song like this one:

"I Like to Come to School"
(Tune: "The Farmer in the Dell")

*I like to come to school.
I like to come to school.
I like to learn and play each day.
I like to come to school.*
(Ask the children what they like to do, then sing it in the song.)

*I like to play with blocks.
I like to play with blocks.
I like to learn and play each day.
I like to play with blocks.*

Capture the children's attention for a book, game, or concept you want to introduce by putting a prop in a bag and singing:

"Surprise Sack"
(Tune: "I'm a Little Teapot")

*What's in the surprise sack, who can tell?
Maybe it's a book, or maybe it's a shell.
What's in the surprise sack, who can see?
It's something special for you and me!*
(Have children guess what they think is in the bag, then remove it and share it with them.)

Clean Up

Clean up is another time during the day that can be a chore for children and teachers. Use a minute timer to help children bring closure to their activities. Set the timer for five minutes, then explain that you will have a "whisper" clean up when it goes off. Model what you want children to do, and encourage them to help you. "Let's see. Where does this car belong?" Give choices to those children who are not cooperating. For example, "Fran, do you want to put away the puzzles or the books?" A cheerful song at cleanup time will also involve children:

"Clean Up Game"
(Tune: "Shortnin' Bread")

*Let's all clean up, clean up, clean up.
Let's all play the clean up game.*

*Put away the blocks, blocks, blocks.
Let's all play the clean up game.*
(Insert words for other items that need to be picked up.)

Reinforce children who are being good helpers by singing their name in a tune like this:

"Jolly Good Helper"
(Tune: "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow")

*(Name) is a jolly good helper.
(Name) is a jolly good helper.
(Name) is a jolly good helper.
They're picking up the toys.*

Line Up

Little ones don't like to wait, and they don't like lines, so avoid them whenever possible. However, when you do need to line up, play pretend games. For example, "Let's be a train. Everybody put their hands on the person's shoulders in front of them. What kind of car are you on the train? Choo-choo, here we go." Challenge children to be "as quiet as snowflakes," to "tiptoe like elves," to "move in slow motion," or say this chant:

"I'm Ready"

*I'm looking straight ahead of me.
My arms are at my side.
My feet are quiet as can be.
I'm ready for outside.*
(Change the words to fit different activities.)

Attention Getters

Many times during the day you will need to get children's attention and calm them down. Try blowing bubbles, whistling, playing a music box or using a magic sign to focus their attention. If the room is loud say, "If you can hear my voice clap three times and look at me." Lower your voice each time until all of the children are participation.

Maybe your class will enjoy a "quiet friend." Cut the top and bottom off a cereal box. Put a puppet on your hand and place it inside the box. Tell the children that when they're quiet, a little friend will come out of the box to see them. When they are very still, stick your hand with the puppet on it out of the box and let the puppet give them directions in a "tiny voice." You might even draw a little face on your index finger with a pen and sing:

"Henry Hush"

(Tune: "London Bridge")

*Henry Hush says, "Please be quiet.
Please be quiet. Please be quiet."
Henry Hush says, "Please be quiet.
Sh! Sh! Sh!"*

In Between Times

Entertain children while they're waiting to begin a new activity by telling them a story, singing a song, or saying a rhyme. You'll be stimulating their brains and developing reading readiness skills!

"Nursery Rhyme Bop"

(Tune: "100 Bottles of Beer on the Wall")

*Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down and broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after.*
(Every nursery rhyme can be inserted in this tune and sung. Give it a try!)

"Clap Your Hands"

(Tune: "Row Your Boat")

*Clap, clap, clap your hands.
Clap your hands with me.
Clap, clap, clap your hands,
Oh, so merrily.*
(Sing other variations, such as "roll your hands," "dance around," "jump up and down," or ask children to suggest different movements.)

Children will be delighted if you insert their names in traditional songs such as, "The Eensy Weensy Spider," "Five Monkeys Jumping on the Bed," and "Where is Thumbkin?" If you have trouble thinking of a tune when you need one, then make a song chart for your classroom. Write titles and draw picture clues of your children's favorite songs or finger plays on a piece of poster board. Hang it in the room to refer to during transition times.

Celebrate

"Accentuate the positive" with children and encourage them frequently in the day by having them "hug themselves" or pat themselves on the back." Demonstrate how to give themselves a "silent cheer" (put your hands in the air and wiggle fingers), clap like a clam (make pincers with fingers and open and shut), applaud like seals (extend arms straight in front of you and clap), or clap like fleas (tap index fingers together). Sing this song to remind children how important they are to you:

"Special Me"
(Tune: "Twinkle Little Star")

*Special, special, special me.
I'm as special as can be.
There is no one quite like me.
I'm as good as I can be.
Special, special, special me.
I'm as special as can be!*

Repetition and Recall

A study of brain-based learning emphasizes the importance of reviewing activities with children. After reading a story, playing a game, or working in learning centers, take a bean bag and toss it to children. As they catch it, ask them to describe what they did or learned. Before children go home, have them recall what they enjoyed most at school, then end on a positive note by singing:

"Good-Bye Friends"
(Tune: "Frerer Jacques")

*Good-bye friends; good-bye friends.
Time to go; time to go.
Thank you for playing; thank you for helping.
Love you so, love you so.*

A Magic Wand

Being a good teacher is a bit like being a magician-you always have to keep a few "tricks" up your sleeve. Now all you need is a magic wand! So get a wooden dowel rod or pencil and cover it with aluminum foil. Dip one end in glue, then roll the glue end in glitter. Taa daa-you have a magic wand! Wave the wand over the children before a story so they will be quiet; tap them gently on the shoulder to dismiss them to go to a learning center; or "Zap!" them with your magic wand to turn them into bunnies, astronauts, butterflies, or bees. Better yet, "Zap!" yourself with the magic wand so all of the "tricks" in this article will work for you!

Jean Feldman, Ph.D., has been a teacher in the Atlanta area for 30 years. She serves on the advisory board of several organizations, presents to professional groups across the country, and is the author of *A Survival Guide for Preschool Teachers*, *Indoor and Outdoor Games and Activities*, *Science Surprises*, *Transition Time*, *Self-Esteem Activities for Young Children*, and *Wonderful Rooms Where Children Can Bloom*.

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