



**HOW TO TEACH KIDS TO
TRANSITION MORE EASILY**



HANDLING TRANSITIONS:

The Background

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Why We Have to Teach This Tool

Kids' brains don't easily transition from one task to another, ESPECIALLY if they are engaged in something. Do you remember that in the last section I mentioned that kids' brains are wired for engagement? Yup. So once they're engaged, their brains want to stay in that spot.

(And by the way, we adults are the same way! Imagine you are in the middle of trying to pay your bills online, you're focused, and your child comes up and says "MOM!" or "DAD!" and interrupts you ...It's frustrating for us – and our brains.)

So when we ask them to transition, it's like they're watching a cliffhanger on TV and we ask them to stop right before they find out if the main character dies. It creates a lot of Yuck (and therefore negative behavior – disrespect, ignoring, meltdowns).

That's why they have trouble with...

Getting off of electronics to come to the dinner table; leaving birthday parties, playgrounds, and other places that provide stimulation; going to new places (even if they know they'll have fun once they get there)

But, they still have to make those transitions!

The good news is that if we understand how brains work, we can teach them tools for transitioning more easily so that it's not as uncomfortable for them – or for us.

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How We Teach This

Just like teaching kids to handle monotonous tasks, teaching kids to transition is about working with their brains instead of against them. And what the brain craves is closure. Once an activity is over, we have a much easier time disengaging from it. (You're happy to answer your child's question once you've finished paying your bills.) So we start helping kids transition when we:

Use the Rhythm of the Activity

(rather than the clock) to create a stopping point

Have them transition AFTER they've gotten to the end of a level on a video game or the end of a chapter in a book or the end of a scene in a movie. (I'll give you examples on the next few pages.) But let's say there IS no end point to an activity... OR you haven't come up with an end point ahead of time. In that case you're going to help them

Slowly Transition From One Mental Space to the Next

Instead of yanking their brain out of its state of engagement, teach them to slowly descend from that place (in their minds) to the place where they have to be. You do this by getting into their world with them and talking to them about what they were doing as you shift to the next activity. (I'll give you examples on the next few pages.)



HANDLING TRANSITIONS:

What Doesn't Work

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EXAMPLES OF WHAT WE USUALLY DO THAT DOESN'T WORK

Patrick's mom is playing a game with him. When she tells him he only has five minutes until they have to stop, he throws a fit.

The problem: Because Patrick is in the middle of doing something he enjoys, he gets upset at the thought of having to end.

The solution: Patrick's mom can help Patrick create some closure so that the end point of the game won't be so abrupt. She has him what he'd like his last 3 moves to be so his brain has a chance to anticipate the closure of the activity.

Amelia's dad has taken her to the playground. When it starts to rain and her dad tells her they have to run to the car, Amelia refuses to leave.

The problem: Amelia was in the middle of doing something engaging, and all of a sudden she was asked to stop. She has difficulty making this type of transition.

The solution: Amelia's dad could ask her about what she was playing as they run to the car. Continuing the engagement will help her transition more easily.

YOUR TURN!

What is a transition (from one activity to another) that your child struggles with?

How do you respond?

The problem *(Does your response provide closure or help them slowly transition?):*

The solution:

On the next few pages, you'll see suggestions that are meant to give ideas for teaching kids how to transition between activities, especially if one of them is engaging them!

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Examples

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If you can, before a child needs to make a transition, ask them to identify an end point.

If they're going to a friend's house, instead of "I'll pick you up at 7:00", say,
"I'll pick you up after dinner."

If they're going to a playground, instead of "We're leaving in 5 minutes," say,
"We're leaving after you go down the slide 8 more times."

If they're playing a video game, instead of "You have 30 minutes to play," say,
"What's a good stopping point that falls within 30 minutes?"

If you haven't done that, about 10 minutes before they have to transition, ask them to identify an end point.

"We need to leave soon. What's the last thing you want to do before we go?"

"What's the one thing you want to finish before we leave?"

"I can see you're in the middle of doing something. We need to leave soon. What's a good place for you to stop that activity?"

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If you haven't done any of that, get into their world and help them slowly transition out

Walk over to them, look at what they're doing and say:

"I can see that you're watching 'XYZ Show.' What did [main character's name] do in this episode?
Why don't you tell me as we walk to the dinner table."

"Wow, you're on level 4 of your game? How did you do that? Tell me about it on the way to soccer
practice!"

"You and your friend were obviously having a lot of fun. Can you tell me about what you were
doing? Is it something we could do together sometime?"



So remember...

When they have to get off of electronics ...

Instead of saying, "Stop playing, It's time for dinner!"

Try:

Asking them ahead of time what a good stopping point will be OR

Asking them what their last thing will be OR

Letting them tell you what they were doing as they come to the dinner table

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When they have to go to bed...

Instead of saying, "I know you're in the middle of [activity], but it's time for bed."

Try:

Choosing an end point to the activity before it begins OR

Asking them to choose the last part of the activity they'd like to complete OR

Asking them to tell you what they might do the next day with that activity as you walk to bed together

When they have to leave something fun...

Instead of saying, "It's time to leave! Now!"

Try:

Having them identify a natural stopping point in the event before it begins OR

Asking them to choose the last thing they'd like to do before they leave OR

Asking them questions about different parts of the event as you leave together

HANDLING TRANSITIONS:

What Will YOU Do?

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What transitions does your child struggle with?

What are two ways you can make the transition more successful?

Your idea:

Their idea: