

This issue of the Parent Connection Newsletter focuses on transitions. It highlights a variety of strategies that can be used to help your child transition successfully during daily routines. We hope that you find this information useful!

Transitioning to Success!

Written by: Kelly Alves, Parent Education and Support Supervisor, TPAS, Surrey Place Centre



It is very common during TPAS Parent Education events that a parent will inquire “How can I get my child to come inside from the backyard?” or “Once he gets on the computer, I just don’t know how to end this activity without him getting upset...”. These statements are referring to transitions that occur in their child’s routine. People often think of major events when they hear the word transition: moving from childhood to adolescence, changing schools, moving homes, or adding a new baby to the family. However, the word transition can also be used to describe times when your child has to stop an activity, move from one location to another, and begin something new.

Whether at home or school, transitions occur naturally and frequently. Children with autism may become anxious or upset when their routines change or when they are expected to transition between activities. Researchers have suggested that this may be due to a greater need for predictability, challenges in understanding what activity will be coming next, or difficulty when certain activities are disrupted. A number of strategies are available to help parents prepare for and support their child during transitions.

First-Then Boards

Most often transitions occur following a verbal statement (for example, “time for a bath”

or “let’s go outside”). Verbal statements alone may not be the most effective way to cue transitions for children with autism. Verbal language may not be quickly understood and a verbal statement may not provide enough time for your child to shift attention from their current task or activity to the next. A “First – Then” board is a visual support that may be an effective strategy to help your child prepare for upcoming transitions. A “First-Then” board could motivate your child to complete activities he may not enjoy and clarify when he can do what he likes. The ‘First’ section shows a picture representing a task that your child is expected to complete, and the ‘Then’ section shows a picture of a preferred item or activity (reinforcer) that he can have afterwards.

Timers


A timer helps a child understand how much time remains in an activity before he will be expected to transition to another activity or location. Presenting time-based information visually may help children with autism understand abstract language such as “only a few minutes left”. There are many types of timers available: some show time remaining numerically, while others use colour. Timers can be useful for assisting parents with setting limits, managing time spent on preferred activities (for example, on the computer or

riding a bike), and helping prepare children for change. To use a timer, set it for the amount of time remaining in the activity. When the timer goes off, show your child that time is up, and help him to transition to the next activity.

Increasing Reinforcement for Successful Transitions

There may be activities or events that are particularly enjoyable for your child. Ending these activities to begin others may cause some upset. However, your child probably makes many successful transitions throughout the day, such as moving from room to room. Reinforcing these transition, with items or events that are meaningful to your child is a great way to “catch him being good”. By reinforcing transitions your child makes successfully and independently, it may become more likely he will transition successfully in the future.

Smooth transitions are a common concern for parents. The strategies above may be used individually or in combination. Remember that learning to use a new support may require practice, and that your child will need frequent reinforcement to become successful.

 For additional strategies, borrow these books from the Parent Lending Library:

Visual Supports for People with Autism: A Guide for Parents and Professionals - by Marlene J. Cohen.

Autism 24/7: A Family Guide to Learning at Home and in the Community - by Andy Bondy & Lori Frost

A Parent's Perspective: Planning for Changes in Your Child's Routine

An interview with: Carolina Torres Sánchez, Parent



There are a variety of strategies that you can implement to help your child transition successfully between activities. TPAS Parent Connection talked to one parent about their use of these strategies at home and in the community.

Can you tell me about any transitions with which your child has difficulty?

Martin has a difficult time transitioning between activities when we go out on the weekend

because every weekend is different.

What are some of the strategies that you have found useful for making these transitions easier? Do you use any materials during these transitions?

The night before a weekend activity, we talk about what we are going to do, and how we are going to get there the next day. In the beginning we used pictures of the places that we were going to visit. We would tell Martin and show him pictures: "first eat breakfast, then go in the car, next drive to the park, and last play on the swings". As he learned what to expect with pictures and words, we can now use just "first... then...next... and last" language without pictures for his everyday routines. He will repeat what we said and it seems to help him know what to expect and he is much more calm when he knows what is happening.

Right now we are helping him with unexpected transitions such as having to go to the bank or gas

station. We still use pictures to help him with new transitions that he has not experienced before such as taking the bus to school for the first time. We are also using a transitional item. Martin can have his toy car on the school bus and another toy while at the bank. It helps him to have a familiar toy during transitions.

What would your advice be to other parents to help facilitate smoother transitions in the community and at home?

My advice would be to let your child know beforehand what transition is coming by talking about it and showing pictures whenever possible. Take the pictures with you and show them just before the transition. Don't forget to include unexpected transitions that we parents might forget, such as picking up a sibling or stopping to get bread

Upcoming events:

Please visit www.surreyplace.on.ca for more information & other events

Parent Education Workshops

- ABA Key Terms
- Building ABA into Family Routines
- Communication
- Diet & Nutrition
- Toilet Training

Please contact your Family Support Coach for dates and Locations

at the grocery store. Keep these everyday smaller transitions in mind when making pictures to prepare for transitions.

We came to Surrey Place Centre to see how his team was helping him transition between activities, and we learned to say "first... then" with pictures and simple language. Then as he understood more, we expanded the language to include "first... then...next...and last".

For additional parent education resources ask your Supervising Therapist or Family Support Coach about titles in the Parent Library

ConnectABILITY.ca a must-see website for families!

Written by: Heidi Hoile, Family Support Coach, TPAS, Surrey Place Centre

ConnectABILITY.ca is a valuable website created for people with developmental disabilities and their families. The site is easy to explore and information is available in different languages and forms. There are tip sheets, articles, discussion groups, online workshops and even podcasts that discuss a wide variety of topics related to parenting a child with special needs.

ConnectABILITY.ca offers a range of regularly updated information and strategies on a wide

variety of topics such as preparing your child for daily transitions. The article "Preparing for Transitions" outlines why changes in routine may be a challenge for your child and how to plan ahead to make them easier. Strategies such as verbal warnings, visual countdowns, and how to use transitional objects are explained in detail. ConnectABILITY.ca has additional articles on specific daily routines such as bedtime, naptime, and mealtime, and how to approach these routines so that transitions can become

smoother.

Visual supports are commonly recommended as a strategy to help your child with daily transitions. Being able to see what is coming up next can ease anxiety about changes in the routine or prepare your child for non-preferred activities. ConnectABILITY.ca has a tool called a Visuals Engine that gives parents the ability to create visual supports with ease. It allows parents to select a template, insert the provided pictures or your own photos

into the template, and print the customized visual support right from home. There are descriptions of the different types of visual supports to use and the article "Using Visuals" describes how to use these visuals with your child once you have created them. Visit connectABILITY.ca to start creating your own resources today!

To review these strategies, go to www.connectABILITY.ca or speak to your Family Support Coach.