Promoting Learning and Positive Behaviour at Home

Transitioning for Children and Young People with Additional Needs

Resource 7

This resource is part of a series of seven booklets on Promoting Learning and Positive Behaviour in the Home developed by the NCSE Behaviour Practitioner team. The series is for parents of children and young people with additional needs.
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Resource 2: Home Routines for Children and Young People with Additional Needs
Resource 3: Using Reward Systems for Children and Young People with Additional Needs
Resource 4: Behaviour Contracts for Children and Young People with Additional Needs
Resource 5: A Total Communication Approach for Children and Young People with Additional Needs
Resource 6: Life Skills for Children and Young People with Additional Needs

Resource 7: Transitioning for Children and Young People with Additional Needs
What is Transitioning?

Transitioning is the process of moving from one activity or place to another. For children and young people with additional needs, transitioning refers to moving from task to task, activity to activity and place to place.

Transitioning can be one of the most difficult activities for children and young people with additional needs, especially if they depend on predictability and consistency to help them make sense of the world around them. It involves change and disruption to routines which in turn, can result in an increase in stress and anxiety. When asked to transition from an enjoyable activity to something less desirable, some children and young people may even experience a meltdown.

Children and young people with additional needs will require daily practice and the use of additional supports will help them to transition more readily and successfully.
Additional Support to Help my Child

Visual Supports
Visual supports can take the form of First-Next boards and visual schedules. Visual supports will help reassure your child about what is going to happen next, satisfy your child’s need for predictability and also help to promote independence. Refer to the booklet on Home Routines for Children and Young People with Additional Needs for more information.

Visual supports can also be grouped together to give your child information in a story format. These are known as Social Stories™. Social stories™ will give your child a chance to hear about and rehearse the steps involved in a transition so they feel prepared. It’s important to note that Social Stories™ are most effective when a child has the prerequisite skills to process pictures and comprehend script. See https://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/ for more information on Social Stories™.

Natural Time Cues
Taking advantage of a natural time cue embedded in a task can help your child to transition. For example, a child may be happy to transition to the garden once they have time to finish their puzzle or take a bath when they get to the end of their favourite TV programme.

Timers and Count Downs
Not all tasks have a natural finish and you may need to signal to your child that time is up. Using count down, auditory timers, sand timers or singing the same song from start to end are all examples of how to do this. Prompting time cues gives your child consistent information about what is happening and when this will happen. Use whatever cue works best for your child and your circumstances at home.
Transition Objects

Transition objects might include a toy, book or fidget that your child likes to carry around. These items may act as distractors to reduce stress associated with moving from place to place or task to task. Objects of reference can also be used as transition objects. For more information on Objects of Reference please refer to the booklet on A Total Communication Approach for Children and Young People with Additional Needs.

Consider giving a transition object to your child in advance of transitioning, to help him/her process the information. The object can be gradually removed when your child is ready. Refer to the Booklets on Home Routines and A Total Communication Approach for Children and Young People with Additional Needs for more information.
Calming Strategies

Some children may like to use calming strategies that help with the stress associated with transitioning. Some examples include practising breathing techniques, using chewy toys or other sensory objects. If your child is using any of these strategies, contact your school or your child’s Occupational Therapist. More information is also provided in the ‘Let’s Get Regulated’ series of booklets on the NCSE website www.ncse.ie/parent-resources. These booklets provide information on how parents can support sensory regulation for toddlers, pre-schoolers and teenagers at home.
It is important to remember that transitioning is a difficult skill that we all have to learn and one that is particularly difficult for children and young people with additional needs. Often these children need some extra time to understand what is happening and what they need to do. The best way to support them is to be patient, clear and offer rewards for when they do well.

The following steps may help to support your child. These steps can be used for all transitioning, including task to task, activity to activity and place to place.

**Steps for Transitioning**

1. Prepare and plan ahead. Decide on what supports you will use with your child. For example, gather all materials that you need such as your child’s transition object, First-Next board or timer. Choose where you want your child to go e.g., the garden.

2. Choose a reward that will help motivate your child. That may be praise, a simple high five, a token or a favourite item. The more difficult transitioning is for your child, the more important it will be to ensure that you use a reward that your child really enjoys.

3. Decide how you are going to prepare your child for the transition. This might include talking to your child, putting relevant pictures on your child’s First-Next board or show your child the timer.

4. For some children, you may need to think about breaking a transition down into smaller more manageable stages. The number of stages depend on the level of difficulty your child is experiencing.

5. It is important that your child is successful at each stage before moving to a more advanced stage. Go at your child’s pace.
6. See below for an example of how you might break a daily transition into smaller stages:

**The stages:**

A. Walking to the back door

B. Walking to the back door, opening it and stepping outside

C. Walking to the back door, opening it, stepping outside and walking around the garden

**Stages of a Transition from the House to the Garden**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan</th>
<th>Prepare</th>
<th>Best effort</th>
<th>Reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>First – Then</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Time to go</td>
<td>![Reward Icon]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>First – Then</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Time to go</td>
<td>![Reward Icon]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>First – Then</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Time to go</td>
<td>![Reward Icon]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. It is important to reward your child’s best effort at each stage. Refer to the booklet on Reward Systems for Children and Young People with Additional Needs. Remember, transitioning is difficult and can be stressful for your child. It is important to use appropriate supports to motivate your child and to reward their best efforts along the way.

**Top Tips!**

- Preparation and planning is key.
- Break down difficult transitions into stages that are more manageable for your child.
- If your child is having difficulty, keep a special reward for transitioning only. Refer to the booklet on Using Reward Systems for Children and Young People with Additional Needs for further information.
- Introduce novel rewards to help motivate your child.
- Keep supports in place even when the 'going' is good.
- Choose an additional support that suits your child e.g., if the noise of a timer triggers behaviour, try counting down.
- Allow your child adequate time to finish up what they are doing before transitioning.
- Encourage and praise every effort your child makes.
- Practise transitioning as much as possible.
- Stay calm and positive. Take a break when you need to.
Video sample
• https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLqtJHcpM-I

Helpful links:
• https://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/
• www.ncse.ie/parent-resources

Reference
• https://integratedtreatmentservices.co.uk/our-approaches/speech-therapy-approaches/objectsofreference/