



# Tips for Tots



## Tip #6: Supporting Young Children with Transitions

## Strategies

Did you know?

### Infant/Toddler:

Infants and toddlers depend on consistent and predictable routines. They gain much of their sense of security from familiar adults, items and routines. They are especially sensitive to change – even the smallest changes can cause stress. While daily changes and transitions are often unavoidable, it is important to be aware of and consider the impact they may have on very young children. Understand that a child’s temperament plays a major role in how they adapt to changes. Adults can plan ways to help infants and toddlers feel secure, while considering the individualized needs of the child.

### Preschool:

Preschool children respond better to transitions when they are prepared in advance & know what to expect from their caregivers. Children who experience transitions, such as foster placements, new childcare settings & visitations, can feel as though they have no control over their environment. This sense of lost control can create a great deal of anxiety & cause a child to exhibit many challenging behaviors. Reducing the number of transitions in a preschooler’s day and preparing them for changes in routine will provide them with a sense of safety and control, reducing challenging behaviors.

### Infant/Toddler:

- Try to plan as few transitions as possible for the child. Limiting the number of transitions reduces stress and helps maintain a calm atmosphere for the child.
- Prepare the child for upcoming changes by telling them what is about to happen and carrying out a consistent transition routine. Talk with the child about what is happening while it is occurring.
- Infants and toddlers are just learning to soothe themselves. Support a calming and soothing atmosphere by providing access to blankets, stuffed toys, family photos, or pacifiers during transition times. This will help them learn how to self-soothe.
- Provide extra affection and closeness including hugs and reassuring words. Be available to support the child through stressful transitions.
- Give extra reassurance during specific times such as naptime/ bedtime, mealtimes, daily routines and visits with family members.

### Preschool:

- Alert all caregivers including the childcare setting of any transitions; provide details such as day, time, typical reactions and helpful strategies, so they may also help to prepare the child.
- Take time to prepare children for upcoming transitions. Look at a calendar together and count down the days until the transition and/or use a clock to talk about how long it will last, when it starts and when it finishes.
- Explain to them what will happen before, during and after the transition. Ex. Riding in the car, visiting with a parent/sibling, eating food or going to the park, saying goodbye, etc. Talk about what they will hear, see and do during the visit or event.
- Create a transition routine that involves making a visitation/ transition bag. Talk about what items the child might like to include in their bag, such as: photos, a stuffed animal or blanket, paper and crayons, books, small toys or manipulatives. Have the child assist in packing the items.
- Be prepared for different reactions both before and after difficult transitions. A child might need more physical and emotional support around the transition. Talk to the child about what kinds of feelings they might have before and after. Help them express their feelings in words. Offer extra hugs and comfort or extra space when a child becomes distressed.

### Resources:

Routines and Transitions: A Guide for Early Childhood Professionals by Nicole Malenfant (2006)  
The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn  
Website: [www.consciousdiscipline.com](http://www.consciousdiscipline.com)

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