

## Supporting Transitions for Infants and Toddlers

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## PRACTITIONER NOTES

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**BACKGROUND:** Classroom transitions occur at drop-off and several times each day, and are often challenging for young children, caregivers, and educators. These transitions can often be stressful and create anxiety, particularly for infants and toddlers. To ease this anxiety, educators and caregivers can establish routines involving positive interactions and a responsive environment (Jung, 2011; Xu, 2006). Routines should be responsive to individual children's needs, and consistent implementation is essential for success. We present ways to establish and support individualized routines to promote successful classroom transitions.

### Creating individual routines

- Consider the *child's age and developmental needs*
- Create *spaces in the environment* that allow children to engage in different levels of activity (e.g., racing cars, reading books, building blocks)
- Introduce and *model verbal or visual supports* (e.g., timer, daily schedule cards)

### Establishing and implementing routines

- Educators and caregivers collaborate to *develop routines*
- Create a *consistent way to communicate* upcoming transitions throughout the day (e.g., song, lights off)
- *Adjust routines* to respond to children's changing needs (e.g., stranger anxiety, illness)

**APPLICATION:** In the scenarios below, Jazatavia supports children's individualized transition routines.

During circle time Ms. Tavia reads a social story to a group of preschoolers that **models transition behaviors**. "When Jax comes to school he can wave to his mom or give her a hug to say goodbye. Then Jax can choose where he wants to play." Ms. Tavia follows up by asking each child what they do when they say goodbye to their parents. Some children respond by saying, "Ask for a hug or kiss," or "Read a book and wave." She finishes circle time by having each child **choose one activity from blocks, books, dramatic play, and art** to work before library time. As children leave the circle Ms. Tavia **sings their daily transition song** to remind the children how to be safe while making a fun choice.

Ms. Tavia has noticed that Ronan, a 2-year-old, regularly becomes defiant and starts screaming when he has to leave the Lego table at clean-up time. **Ms. Tavia and Ronan's father** decide to use a timer as a **visual support** to help Ronan have a successful transition. The next day, Ms. Tavia introduces the timer and explains the new plan to Ronan. Later she tells Ronan that it is 5 minutes before clean-up and has him help her set a timer. However, when the timer goes off Ronan still screams and refuses to leave the Lego table. After **consistently** using the timer with Ronan for all transitions for the next week, Ms. Tavia makes a small **adjustment to the routine**.

The next day Ms. Tavia shows Ronan a **picture schedule** that she keeps clipped to her pants to remind him of the day's events. When she has Ronan set the timer she also gives him a "first-then" message by telling him, "First we will go to the library and then you can keep building Legos. You can save your work until after we come back from the library. First library, then Legos." Ronan smiles and repeats, "First library, then Legos!" and hops in line with his peers. Ms. Tavia praises Ronan for staying calm and lets him choose what song to sing while walking to the library.

### TO LEARN MORE:

[NAEYC Young Children](#)

### REFERENCES:

- Jung, J. (2011). Caregivers' playfulness and infants' emotional stress during transitional time. *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(10), 1397-1407.
- Xu, Y. (2006). Toddlers' emotional reactions to separation from their primary caregivers: Successful home-school transition. *Early Child Development and Care*, 176(6), 661-674.