

Did You Know?

Transition Magician

CREATIVE WAYS TO HELP KIDS THROUGH THE STRESSES OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Getting your child to do what you want him to do when you want him to do it is often one of the bigger challenges in parenting. You expect your child to follow along comfortably with your normal routines, and then suddenly you find yourself in the middle of a full-scale power struggle. What happened? Your child refuses to cooperate with your plan, and you realize you have lost control and you have instantaneously morphed into a screaming lunatic! Guilt floods in. You feel hopelessly ineffective. And you wonder: *Why is this happening? What can help?*

Transitions refer to changes. Almost ALL young children have some difficulty with change. Most do not adapt easily. Changes feel uprooting, and children prefer that things stay the same. Transitions can be stressful and frustrating. Remember that children are like adults. They need advance warning when change is coming. Thinking ahead and being prepared is one thing that really *can* help. A little bit of notice, along with a clever strategy, can make life a lot smoother with little ones.

SOME OF THE MOST POSITIVE DISCIPLINE IS PREVENTION.

Use clever ideas to avoid problems by thinking ahead!

Children cooperate better when they have time to prepare for what is coming next. Young children also love routines and are comforted by them. Also, preschool children are *particularly* open to imagination and fantasy because they are still in the stage of “magical thinking” and symbolic play, which influences their reasoning and problem-solving. Knowing this, you can use it to your advantage: be sure to be playful, as well as predictable, when you parent.

To *effectively* parent preschoolers takes several skills: staying calm, staying in charge, having a plan (some strategies), and staying flexible. It helps to have MANY creative tools that you can pull out of your “parenting backpack” when you need them. In many of the ideas below, I have drawn from a delightful book called *Transition Magician for Families* by early childhood educators, R. Civovjicek, M. Henthorne, and N. Larsen, c. 2001. A number of these strategies can easily be built into your life. Some you may want to use only occasionally. Others you may use more regularly. You will find they become a kind of “safety net” that gives your child a sense of security and you the comfort of knowing you are in charge.



FOR EVERYDAY ROUTINES ♦ Clean-up / Bedtime / “Time to Go”

Picture Schedule

Help your child's day go smoother by using a pictorial schedule. This is a technique used by many special education teachers, but it can be incredibly helpful for all young children because it makes expectations for the day so clear. Families find that posting pictures of “what comes next” in a logical order on the refrigerator can ease the difficulty of transitions for children who resist change. This is really helpful for children who are still developing language or who have trouble processing language (receptive language delays). You can make this quite simply by cutting out pictures (or using your own photos) and putting them in order to show your child's daily schedule: getting up (bed), getting dressed (shirt), eating breakfast (cereal), brushing teeth (tooth brush), playtime (toy), going potty (toilet), leaving for school (car), going to school (school), etc. You can also make a visual schedule the way behavior specialists suggest by posting pictures (using Velcro) in a line on a long string of paper. Ask your child to go and point to (or tell you) what comes next. Say, “*What does the picture say comes next today?*” As each event happens, you can ask the child to take off the card and turn it over. “*Now what is next? What do you need to do?*” Having something *concrete* to look and manipulate makes very clear what is ahead. Let the picture schedule become the “boss,” instead of you.





Beat the Clock

Clean-up can be challenging with a preschooler. But preschoolers LOVE to play games, and they love thinking that they are winning! Children love to play “Beat the Clock.” At clean-up time, use a clock or set a timer for a realistic amount of time, such as five minutes. Say, “*Who can beat the clock?*” Watch your children race to run around and pick up their toys. You will be amazed how quickly they work, spurred on by the ticking timer. Cheer them on and be enthusiastic if they beat the timer. You can also use this to help children get dressed in the morning. Challenge them to see if they can beat the clock. As with any parenting strategy, you need to stay flexible. If it seems that “beat the clock” no longer works as efficiently as it used to, retire it for a while. You can always bring it out later. (Note: You can do the same for toys. Rotate toys when children tire of them. It’s a treat when they come out again later. For some children, it’s like Christmas or a birthday all over again!)



Use the Timer

How many parents know that the kitchen timer can become their new best friend? The timer becomes the “bad guy” signaling a change—not you! Get a timer that you can carry around with you and be sure to find one that buzzes loudly. Use it for anything --from clean up to bed time. The timer is a wonderful transition prompt, giving your child notice of an upcoming change. “*When the timer buzzes, it will be time to get in the car and go to school.*” (or “... *take a bath/clean up/wash hands for dinner/get your pajamas on,*” etc.) The timer is one technique that can be part of your daily routine. Remember to say, “*The timer says it’s time to go now.*” Saying it this way keeps the timer as the neutral time-keeper. You are simply following the timer’s directions. It’s amazing how this works!

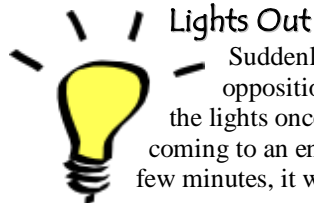


Turn on the Music

In the classroom, the children learn that transitions song—or sing *The Clean-up Song* like the Early *clean-up.*” Or do the opposite and give your same music every time you want to transition with the task, and they mentally prepare themselves. Pretty soon, this becomes a routine that they don’t even have to think about.



come when the music changes. You can play an upbeat Preschool does: “*Clean-up, clean-up, it’s time for* child a warning by turning on some soft music. Use the to clean-up. That way, children learn to associate the music



Lights Out

Suddenly telling children that they have to stop playing and pick up their toys is sure to bring opposition and resistance. Choose another strategy that respects their need for a warning. Turn off the lights once or twice or dim them to give your children notice. This will alert them that playtime is coming to an end. It gives them time to wind up what they are doing. In a soft voice, announce that in a few minutes, it will be time to pick up toys. After a few minutes have passed, dim the lights again and announce that it is now time to pick up toys.

Magic Pickup Lotion

Make clean-up time a little magical for kids by using “magic pickup lotion.” You can make a special glitter lotion by filling a small plastic bottle with baby lotion and adding a pinch of glitter. Just rub a little glitter lotion on your child’s hands and tell her that the magic begins. Rub some on your hands, too, and show her how they shake and dance right over to some toys and magically pick them up and put them on the shelf. This will get your child moving, too. The authors caution that this strategy may wear off in a bit, so put it away when it loses its magic and try it again later.



Puppet Talk

There is truly something magical about puppets. When they talk, children listen! Using puppets is a great way to get kids to cooperate. Kids will usually do most things puppets ask them. Be dramatic and playful. Use clever voices and accents. You will find that children respond to puppets more readily than to their parent’s same old voice. Puppets can remind your child of tasks that need to be done (ex: “*It’s time to change your diaper....*” etc.) or they can talk with your child to entertain him while he is doing something less agreeable (like sitting on the potty, going to the doctor, etc.). Surprisingly, because of young children’s use of “magical thinking,” they see puppets as totally separate beings. So discard your worries about feeling silly and just be as dramatic as you can.

Your child will love it. And remember, in a pinch, you can make anything “talk.” So grab a sock, an oven mitt, or even a folded paper plate. This makes routine tasks fun.

5-3-1-GO!



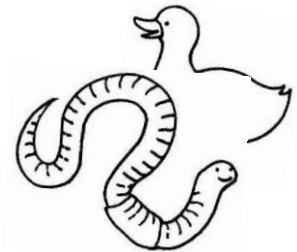
When kids are having fun, it's really hard for them to change gears on a dime. We want them to just pick up and go when we say "Time to leave!" Or we expect them to finish their game and put it away immediately when we call them to dinner. But children need to process the time *mentally* before they follow through *physically*. Here's a technique you can use to meet your needs—whether it's to call your child off the playground or move him to bath time or towards bed.

It works like this. You say, "Matthew, five minutes...and it will be time to go!" (hold up your hand and show five fingers—a visual clue!). Then go over and say, "Three minutes..." (show three fingers).

Then, "One minute...." (hold up one finger). Finally, "Time to go!" At this point, you must immediately GO! If you don't go right away, this won't be any different than any of your old techniques that don't work, cautions **Kid Cooperation** author, Elizabeth Pantley. And please, no more words. Forget the begging or pleading. Just take action. If this means you need to dive into the ball pit and pull your screaming child out, do it! Pantley says to be sure to keep in mind that this won't work the first time you use it—and maybe not the second. But by the third or fourth time, your kids will understand and accept this new way of doing things. This is a powerful tool that really will work if you use it with calm persistency. You won't want to "retire" this skill. Keep it at the front of your bag of tricks.

Wiggle, Slither, and Quack

Get your child to bed in a fun way. Ask him if he can wiggle his way to bed like a worm, or quack and waddle like a duck, or even fly like a bird? The next night, let your child choose the animal he wants to imitate. Say, "Five minutes till bedtime. Would you like to gallop like a horse or slither like a snake tonight? You choose." Stay positive and always try to build in choice wherever you can—as long as you stay firmly in charge of the ultimate goal (like getting into bed). Preschoolers especially like feeling independent and they *love* to think they have some power, too.



Monster Spray

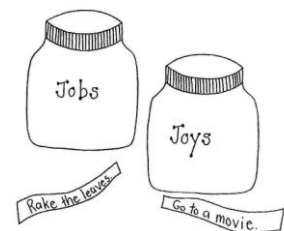


Do you happen to be one of the many parents who have monsters inhabiting their home? Do they tend to come out at night, worrying your child at bed time? Then here is a magic transition helper that you may want to consider. Make your own "monster spray" by filling a small spray bottle with a drop of food coloring and a drop of perfume. Use your most confident voice to inspire belief in your child. (Let your child's "magic thinking" do the rest.) Walk around your child's room, spraying here and there, "protecting" your child and his space with your very powerful spray. Be dramatic! Open the closets and look under the bed. Be sure to spray there, too. You can also walk over to the window, open it, and shoo the monsters out and away. Believe it or not, this really works if you are animated

and convincing.

"Jobs" and "Joys" Jars

Ever wish you could get your child to help with jobs around the house? This is a clever idea. Make two jars, one labeled "Jobs" and one labeled "Joys." Write down different tasks your child could do easily with you: wipe down appliances, rake leaves, sweep, dust, match socks, clean out a drawer, etc. Put those in the "Jobs" jar. In the "Joys" jar, add different activities you could do with your child in your free time, such as read a story, play a game, take a bike ride, take a walk in the neighborhood, bake brownies together, etc. When you have some free time, ask your child to choose one from each jar. Work together to get the "job" done first, and then make a plan for your shared "joy" time together.

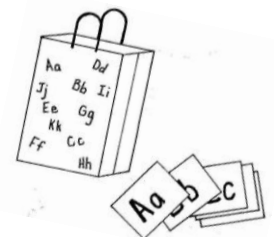


WHEN YOU ARE ON THE MOVE

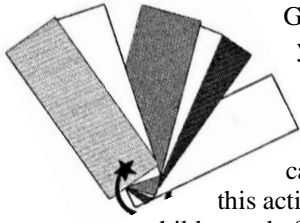
These are useful if you have to travel or drive or even wait for appointments. They all involve language development and conversation building, along with cognitive skill-building.

ABC's in a Bag

Work on letter recognition with older preschoolers while you are on the move or waiting somewhere. Keep a small bag that you have filled with alphabet cards and take it with you when you anticipate needing some distractions. Have your child draw a card out of the alphabet bag and see if she can identify what the letter is. Then help her to think of things that begin with that letter. Ask her to find something in your immediate area that begins with the same letter. You might help her by giving her clues, such as "I spy..." This is a good car game, too.



Color Cards



Go to the paint store and pick up a selection of color cards. Find ones that are sturdy and the size you want. Then make a color ring by choosing an array of colors and punching a hole in one end of each. Insert a metal ring through the holes and Voila! You have an easy-to-carry ring of colors that you can pull out of your pocket when you need something to occupy the time.

Use it in a variety of ways. You can help toddlers learn to name their colors. Preschoolers can be challenged to find something around them that matches the color you choose. Kids love this activity. You can even use it in the car. It also works well when you are outdoors, too. Give your child a card off the ring ask her to go and find a match in the environment.



WHILE YOU WAIT

You may want to think ahead and keep some of these “tools” handy so that you can easily grab one or two when you are stuck in a doctor’s office, waiting for food at a restaurant, or killing time while you wait for an appointment.

Feely Mitten



This is a fun, sensory game to play with your child that promotes problem-solving while you are sitting and waiting somewhere. Find an old adult-sized mitten. Put different objects inside it and ask your child to feel the outside and guess what’s inside. You can use any objects you have—a rattle, crayon, rubber animal, spoon, rock, water bottle cap, etc. You can even dig around in your purse and find objects you can use on the spur of the moment, such as a coin,

lip gloss, comb, cell phone, etc. Help your child describe it to you before he pulls it out: is it hard, soft, big, little, bumpy or smooth? Then reverse roles and let your child hide something for you to guess and have him give you hints.

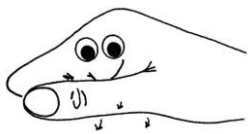
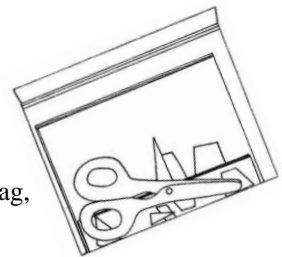


“Look and See” Waiting Bag

Keep this for quiet times only. That way it will work keep your child occupied when you need it. Fill a small cloth “Waiting Bag” with things to ‘look through,’ such as unbreakable mirrors, kaleidoscopes, magnifying glasses, colored page protectors, a prism, and even a tiny bug box. (The *Small Hands* Montessori catalog has many small items that would be perfect: www.forsmallhands.com.) Let your child make funny faces in the mirror, explore his environment with the magnifying glass, and make prisms in the light to entertain himself.

The Cutting Edge

Preschoolers love to cut, and this is a great activity for developing fine motor control. Parents are often hesitant to let young children use scissors, but with supervision and child-safe scissors, this can be a safe and quiet activity. Children can spend long periods just cutting. This is a perfect activity for a waiting room. Grab a plastic baggie that you have filled with index cards and small scissors and let your child have fun. Tuck a pencil in the bag, also, and draw shapes on the index cards. As your child grows more skilled, she can cut out shapes, too. Encourage her child to cut on the lines. When it’s time to go, just sweep all the cuttings into the bag and take them home for a gluing project later.



Bare-Hand Puppet

In a pinch, get out a marking pen and make bare-hand puppets on you and your child. Make a fist with your thumb pointing up. Make two dots for eyes. Then carry on a conversation with each other. If you are somewhere like the doctor’s office, encourage your child to tell your puppet things he may be worried about. To make waiting more entertaining, be sure to give your puppet a silly or squeaky voice as you chat with your child’s puppet.

Activity Boxes: Animal Boxes, Rock Boxes, Junk Boxes

Children love to play with little things. Preschoolers also love to sort and categorize. Make boxes using anything *small*. Gather a collection of similar items such as small stuffed puppies, kitties, plastic dinosaurs, truck-shaped erasers, or colorful plastic fish. Or, purchase a selection of smooth rocks of varying sizes and colors--or start a marble collection. Place your items in a small box, lunch box, or school box. You can even decorate the outside with stickers to match the theme. Ask your child to sort the items by size and category. To further challenge your child, add a couple of dice and ask him to count out the number of objects rolled on the dice. You can also make a Junk Box using all



those annoying little toys and trinkets you have lying around the house. Add Happy Meal characters, a feather, a squishy ball, a magnifying glass, etc. You want things that will pique your child's curiosity—and things that he doesn't get to play with all the time. Take your box out *occasionally* for those while-you-wait times. To make these activity boxes function as 'transition magicians,' you must keep them for special times only!

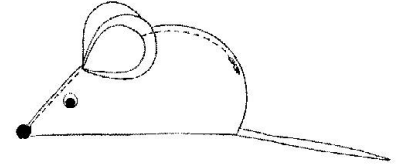


FOR QUIET TIMES

These are good "quiet" activities. Some would even work to keep a child occupied while in church or religious services.

Quiet As a Mouse

Do you want to find a way to know what's going on inside your child? As a child therapist, I learned early on that children *love* to talk to puppets—and they will talk to little animals and tell them things they would never tell you directly. If you are worried about your child, or if you think she is especially moody or irritable or tearful, try bringing this cute little mouse out of your pocket when you have a quiet moment—on a ride home, snuggling together on the couch, or at bedtime when you are rubbing her back. Have the mouse whisper to your child and draw her into conversation. Watch how quickly she engages if you stay in the magical play mode. You can make this mouse yourself or you can look for a little stuffed animal.



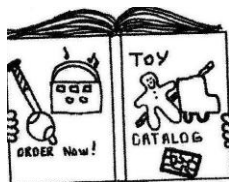
(Directions for Mouse: Cut a 4" heart shape from gray felt for the mouse's body and two smaller heart shapes for the ears—one of pink and one of gray felt. Also cut a thin gray strip for the tail. Fold the big heart in half, stuff it if you like, and sew it or glue it together. Glue on the ears and attach the tail. Then glue on a small pom-pom for the nose and add two moveable eyes. Easy!)

Hanky Baby

This is probably a very old idea, but it still seems like a clever activity that young children today could be intrigued with if it is only given on select occasions. Make a cute little "hanky baby" (or two) out of a large, white men's handkerchief. The neat thing about these babies is that you can keep them in your purse and easily pull them out when you need them. Give them to your child and tell him or her to take care of the baby and keep her quiet (this is especially good during church services). Really play this up. Make her role *very* important! Magically, your child will stay quiet too.



(Directions: To make a "hanky baby," fold a large handkerchief in half, put a ball of cotton or fiberfill in the middle, sprinkle in a pinch of baby powder to stimulate the sense of smell, and gather up the head with piece of ribbon and tie it into a knot and bow. Knot the two corners of the handkerchief for arms. If you want to go all out, you can also sew some lace around the head and glue a rose in the center of the bow.)

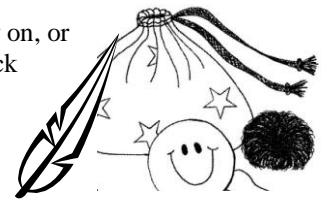


The Toy Catalog

Such a simple thing can keep a child entertained for a long while. Keep a toy catalog tucked away in your car for the times you have to go to the dentist's office or even to church. It can be a life saver--especially if you don't let your child see it at other times. Children love nothing more than paging through a big catalog and dreaming about playing with all the toys they see.

Sensory Soothers

Keep a bag with what we call "sensory soothers"—toys that children can touch, roll, knead, chew on, or watch to calm themselves. Keep a look out. When you see a small koosh balls or stress balls, pick one up and add it to your bag. Feathers are delightful sensory soothers, too. Rub one on your child's cheek or arm. A magic wand filled with liquid and glitter is another sensory soother. So are small stuffed animals with different textures. Some children like to chew on "chewies" that are specially made toys for children who need to calm themselves orally. A simple piece of plastic tubing can work well as a substitute. A small bottle of bubbles can be added, too. Bubble blowing can entertain a child quietly. Even a small ball of play dough can be calming and safe to use when you are waiting together.



BE CREATIVE and BE CONFIDENT--THEN HAVE FUN WITH THESE "MAGICAL" TOOLS!

Fantasy and playfulness can really work to help a preschool child through troublesome transitions.



Sources:

Transition Magician for Families by Ruth Cívovjicek, Mary Henthorne, and Nola Larsen. Redleaf Press, c. 2001.
Kid Cooperation by Elizabeth Pantley. New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 1996.