

Calming Techniques During Transition Times

A few ideas to support children who struggle with transitions — whatever they may be.

Clarity

Help the child know what's coming next. Try:

- Visual timetables, reminders, first and then.
- Visual timers — refer to them throughout the activity.
- A mixture of preferred/non-preferred activities.
- Use "when... and then..." language.
- Social stories to practise transitions calmly — send home too.
- Stick to consistent routines where you can.

Distraction

Give children things to do while waiting:

- A job, or a message to take to the office (can be invented).
- Headphones to reduce noise, or relaxing music.
- A Busy Box with personalised activities.
- Make waiting fun with movement breaks and visual cues.
- Movement activities e.g. blocks to jump over.
- Bubbles, singing.

Transitional Object or Toy

Helps a child feel connected when someone isn't present.

- Something linked to home — photo, cuddly toy, handkerchief, note in lunchbox.
- Something linked to their key adult for unstructured times or when staff are away.
- Something to use on difficult journeys to/from school.

Clear Closure of an Activity

Routines help a child feel safe through predictability.

- A routine for ending an activity — song, music or a clap to signal clear-up time.
- Some children need more time — adapt the strategy for them.
- Alternate preferred/non-preferred activities so there's always something to look forward to.

Sensory Support

- **Quiet space + signal** — a card to ask for quiet time in a partitioned area.
- **Calming tactile input** — tactile bins, weighted blankets, bean bag squishes.
- **Oral sensory input** — chewy snacks, chewellery, smoothie through a straw.
- **Calming auditory input** — quiet music, noise-cancelling headphones.
- **Calming visual input** — dim lights, clear spaces, calm-down jars, visual timetables.
- **Proprioceptive input** — play dough, resistance bands, carrying books.
- **Calming movement** — rocking chair, exercise ball, therapy ball.
- **Yoga, breathing, meditation** — calms the whole nervous system.
- **Quiet fine-motor tasks** — sorting, stringing beads, filing.
- **Try combinations** — tactile bin + calming music, weighted blanket + sensory bottles.

Heavy Work

Can really help children struggling during transitions:

- Massages and/or bear hugs
- Play with a body sock
- Weighted sensory bottles
- Wall pushes, chair dips, wall sits
- Tossing and catching heavy bean bags
- Boxing with gloves against a mat
- Rolling a therapy ball up and down the wall
- Squeezing putty or play dough
- Tearing or crumpling heavy paper
- Cooking — kneading, stirring thick dough
- Stepping onto a chair/bench and jumping down (supervised)
- Digging in wet or kinetic sand
- Writing on, then erasing, a dry erase board
- Pushing against a resistance band tied to a desk

Environment

A calm, quiet and uncluttered environment helps children cope with transitions: clearly defined spaces and work areas, named trays and pegs, floor markers for lining up. Don't rush it — give lots of time to make the switch.