Fun Transition Techniques for Your PreK Classroom

Classroom organization strategies to assist with transitions.
- Post your daily schedule in a central location with words and pictures large enough to see. Review the schedule each morning while “forecasting” the day. Refer to the schedule and utilize a system, such as a “schedule marker,” to indicate the “time” multiple times throughout the day.
- When children understand what is expected and are provided the opportunity and support to engaged in appropriate behaviors, they are more likely to choose this behavior.
  o Use pictures to support your classroom rules/behavior expectations and review them often to help prevent behavior issues.
  o Create rules to assist with transitions and consistently implement them. Simple rules can drastically speed up clean-up time.
    - Put things away before leaving a center.
    - The block center begins cleaning-up at the 5-minute warning.
  o Provide opportunities for children to practice skills that are needed to follow rules. Consider facilitating fun games, such as “feet on the floor” to help foster these skills.
- Gather the news during arrival time and allow a few children to “share the news” during large group time. This strategy can also be used as a “filler” throughout the day if necessary.
- Grandma’s Rule: Plan something fun and pleasant after an activity that is not the children’s favorite.
- Allow children to help plan activities, such as songs and books, through a voting system. Use these activities as motivators during transitions. This provides something for children to “look forward to” while being asked to finish an activity they may not want to stop. There are lots of ways to incorporate school readiness skills by using a variety of materials for children to signify their vote.
- Brush teeth in two groups and have cups with toothpaste on the rim ready prior to the start of toothbrushing.
- Facilitate some type of group discussion/activity during the transition between cleaning-up after meals and toothbrushing. Consider forecasting your daily routine, a book that will be read later or a song that will be played directly afterwards.

Guidelines for Successful Transitions
- Inspect your daily routine for opportunities to minimize transitions.
- Establish a consistent routine.
- Review a pictorial daily routine chart and preview any change in activities.
- Establish the children’s full attention before giving directions
- Match verbal cues with visual props
- Use clear and concise directions
- Use novel props, rhymes and fingerplays
- Give children something to do while waiting
- Model appropriate behaviors and social skills
Jobs that can help with Transitions
Clean-Up Announcer: Provides a “5-minute warning” that clean-up time is about to start.
Collectors – Collect toys in bins during the last minute of clean-up (if needed).
Stockers - Place the toys in the “collector bins” back in the appropriate place.
Snack/Meal Helpers – Assists in setting-up or cleaning-up before/after snacks and meals
**Introduce jobs gradually by adding more throughout the year. Rotate jobs in a systematic way, so children can anticipate their job. It’s up to you when to rotate jobs (weekly or daily).**

Examine your schedule to reduce the number of transitions.
Identify the number of transitions and identify any “set-times” that must remain the same.
- Breakfast, Lunch, Outdoor Play Time, Specials

Consider the following strategies to reduce transitions and waiting time throughout the day.
Longer transitions typically occur when the entire group gathers and separates.
- Have children participate in “arrival time activities,” instead of going straight into greeting/large group/morning circle time first thing in the morning or after breakfast.
  Consider extending “arrival time,” while having children complete certain jobs, such as the weather watcher. You might have all centers open during this time or limit options to “easy clean-up” centers: puzzles, play dough, writing center, table top activities, etc. You might also provide a variety of table-top activities.
- Go straight into choice time after breakfast, lunch, or snack vs. coming together for story time or large group.
- Incorporate toothbrushing into “center time.”
- Do you have 60 minutes of uninterrupted choice time?

Attention Getters:
Use interesting objects or brief activities to get children’s full attention prior to giving instructions.

Use “cues” and novel props to get children’s attention:
- “Call and Response” examples from the song “Attention Getters.”
- Flash the lights
- Wear goofy glasses or a unique hat
- Noise Maker: a “cluck cup,” tune on a xylophone, triangle or drum

Use rhymes or games to get children’s attention:
- Copycat Game
  - Have children point to areas of the classroom and/or body parts; end with “Point to you. Now point to me!” Provide instructions after they’re all point to the teacher.
  - Do 3 with Me Challenges: Hands on your head, focused eyes, listening ears.

Energy Expenders and Settlers
Modify songs and rhymes allowing children to expend their energy. Facilitate the same song/rhyme in a way that allows children to “settle.” These are good strategies to use before lunch and after returning from outdoor play.

Examples from this session: Ram-Sam-Sam, Clap, Snap and Tap, Wiggle Them! Wiggle Them!
Carpet and Waiting Activities

*Provide something for children to do, so they’re not just waiting for everyone else.*

- All Finished Boxes: self-contained activities for children to do while waiting for others.
  - books, buttons, magnetic items, pipe cleaners, clothespins, sensory bottles, magnifying glass and small objects
- Provide children with something to do while waiting in line.
  - pictures of familiar rhymes/finger plays, mystery bags

Extenders and Fillers

*Provide simple activities or challenges for children while they’re “between activities” or “on the move” between activities.*

- Song Bag: allow children to select songs that go into the “song bag.” Simply write the name of a song on a popsicle stick. When you’re in need of a “filler,” have a child grab a stick or two from the bag.
- Mystery Bag: place an object or two in a cloth bag or pillow case. Allow children to feel the bag and guess what’s inside.
- Review additional pieces of “the news” that was gathered during arrival time.

Excusers and Lining Up

*Use strategies for dismissing small groups of children instead dismissing the entire group at once. This will help cut-down waiting time, and provide “learning activities” within transitions.*

- Partner Find
  - Place “matching sticks” in a cup. All the children grab a stick, and then find the other student with the “matching stick.” Have sticks match exactly at the beginning of the year; add complexity to this activity throughout the year. For example, matching upper case and lower case letters or dots and numerals. Dismiss children after they explain how their sticks match-up. This will help stagger the process of dismissing children and reduce the amount of time waiting in lines.
- Excuse small groups of children according to a characteristics and attributes.
  - Clothes: shorts, pants, long/short sleeves, colors
  - Personal Traits: age, hair color, long/short hair, glasses/no glasses
- Separate the class into two teams:
  - Allow children to decide on the “team name” and “mascot.”
  - This allows you to separate or group certain children

*Use strategies for lining up and traveling outside the classroom. Provide something for children to do, besides simply waiting in a straight line.*

- Oranges, Grapes and Spaghetti
  - This “game” has children line up in a way other than a “straight line.”
  - Oranges: Children stand in a circle while holding hands.
  - Grapes: children cluster around the teacher
  - Spaghetti: Children line-up single-file and place their right hand on the shoulder of the person in front of them.
- The Sleeping Snake  
Attach bells to a piece of rope that is long enough for all the children to hold while traveling down the hall or to another location. Allow children to expend their energy by shaking the snake hard prior to leaving the room. Gradually slow down the shaking until the rope comes to a rest. When the bells are no longer ringing, the snake is “asleep.” Challenge the children to keep the bells silent while traveling, so the snake stays asleep. Allow children to “wake up the snake” by shaking the rope once you arrive at your destination.

- Place activities, pictures or items where lines form so children aren’t simply “waiting.”
- Facilitate fingerplays and rhymes while children are in line. This can be a good time to practice quiet voices or “no voice” by doing movements to rhymes without the words.

**Music from this Session:** Half Entertained Music Album by Early Childhood TLC  
- Find Another Friend  
- Attention Getters  
- The Clean Up Countdown  
- Stop, Drop, Clean-Up Shop  
- Who’s Coming to the Rug

**Online Resources:**
Dr. Jean’s YouTube Channel – [https://www.youtube.com/user/drjeansongs](https://www.youtube.com/user/drjeansongs)
Finger Plays I-5; each video contains 5-6 finger plays.
More information on Dr. Jean: [http://drjean.org](http://drjean.org)

**ECERS Scheduling Checklist:** (Developed by Simpson County Regional Training Center)  

**The National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning (NCECDTL)**  
Video: Planning Transitions to Prevent Challenging Behavior (41 Minutes)  

This website has several resources on the topic of transitions:  
[https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/browse/topic/transitions](https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/browse/topic/transitions)

**NAEYC Distant Learning Event:**  
Moving Right Along: Planning Transitions to Prevent Challenging Behaviors  
[https://www.naeyc.org/yc/pastissues/2008/may/distancelearning](https://www.naeyc.org/yc/pastissues/2008/may/distancelearning)

**Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)**  
This website contains lots of helpful resources for teachers. After going to the home page, scroll down to the heading “Resources by Group.” Click on the link “For Teachers/Caregivers” on the left-hand side. Here, you will find “Scripted Stories for Social Situations.” These short stories help children understand social interactions and situations. They are provided in Power Point, so you can personalize them with the names of your children and families, and print them out to make a book. The story, “I Go to Preschool” might be good for helping children separate from their families during arrival time. You’ll also find “What Works Briefs” on a number of topics. Click on the “For Families” tab, for tip-sheets and training modules to share with your families.
**Recommended Readings:**
