

Transitions

Toddlers have a hard time moving from one thing to another. Children this age are often focused on the current moment. That makes it difficult for them to switch gears. Even if they are excited about what will happen next, they might still resist! They act this way because their brains are immature and growing, not because they are trying to be difficult or slow you down.

SOME WAYS TO HELP EASE TRANSITIONS FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILD:

Give them time to prepare. Tell your child that you will be putting away the toys in 10 minutes, then 5 minutes, then 2 minutes. It helps them know that the change is coming even though they don't understand time. They might still be unhappy, but over time they will get better at adjusting.

Plan for a delay. Set yourself up for success. Build time into your daily schedule for transitions to take a while.

Communicate clearly and on their level. Your child might be so busy with what they're doing they don't hear your words. Try crouching down and looking them in the eye. Then use simple language to tell them it will soon be time to move on. Sometimes a gentle hand on their shoulder or a gesture can get their attention.

Try a timer. Some children respond well to a timer. That way it isn't you saying that they have to stop playing. You can say it was the timer!

Have a doll or stuffed animal help you. Your child might transition more easily with a friend or blankie to take along with them (see [“Loveys,” Teddy Bears, and Blankies](#) article).

Create a ritual. Sometimes a special routine or song can be part of daily transitions. You could have a “going to breakfast” song or a “getting in the car” dance. You could also give your child a small job to help move from one thing to another. Perhaps you always lift them up to turn off the lights before leaving the house.



Offer options. Allow your child to make choices when possible. Ask, “Do you want to wear the blue shirt or the green one?” You can also invent a choice if your child seems to like making them. For example, they can choose which piece of bread to toast. Try not to ask questions when there is not a choice, such as, “Do you want to get in the car now?” because they might say, “No!”

Make it a game or a race. A good-natured competition with your child can be motivating (however, races between siblings can backfire). This is particularly funny if you pretend to do it wrong. Say, “Let’s see who can get their shoes on first!” Then, put your hands in your shoes and say, “I won!” Once your child is laughing, you can quickly help them get their shoes on.

Avoid threats. Threats can make some children even more stubborn! Toddlers often want to “do it myself.” Their drive to be independent can cause them to dig their heels in when feeling threatened. Sidestep the power struggle with one or more of the above options.

SCAN FOR MORE INFO

