

## TOOLBOX OF SUGGESTIONS FOR MAKING SMOOTH TRANSITIONS

### BEGINNING THE SESSION

It may be tempting to jump immediately into the heart of the subject matter. But it is important to use “approach activities” and guided conversation, because children arrive with their heads full of thoughts. Some may have been scolded for not getting ready quickly enough or for being too noisy; they may be nurturing anger. Some may be sad, overly excited or “wound up.” It is important to have something for the first child to do when he or she arrives, and to draw others into the group or available activities as they come. If children

“Transitions may seem at first to be minor concerns, but Kounin concluded from his investigations that teachers’ ability to manage smooth transitions and maintain momentum was more important to work involvement and classroom control than any other behavior-management technique.”

- C. M. Charles

have a broad choice of activities when they enter, such as games or learning centers, more specific approach activities or conversation will be needed as the “lesson” begins. Asking questions that help the children relate their own lives to a lesson theme are often the most helpful transition.

### LEAVING THE ROOM OR MOVING TO ANOTHER PART OF THE ROOM

When moving from one part of the room to another, you may want to notice which children are ready and cooperating. Call their names and ask them to move to the new location first. Or say “whoever is wearing white shoes” or “something blue,” for example can move to the tables, rug or far corner; then name another color. You can use names beginning with certain letters or a variety of other categories. Make sure that it is not always the same children who get to move first. Choun and Larson (*The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Children’s Ministry*) suggest hiding an object in the room and having children look for it. As soon as they spot it, they are to go directly to their seats (without touching it or revealing its location).

School-age children are used to the idea of lining up. It helps if they know the expectations for how they will act while in line; some teachers ask them to not talk; some allow them to whisper. Some teachers instruct children to keep their hands by their sides or to themselves, and to keep their feet to themselves in line. Most tell children to walk (rather than run) out the door, and so on. Some have the quietest table or those who got their space cleaned up get in line first. Others use different criteria each day, such as those wearing various colors. It is important not to be biased, such as always letting girls line up first.

Make lining up more interesting sometimes by having children line up by birthday, from January to December, or switch the calendar and have the latest December birthday go first. Have them line up alphabetically by first name, by number of siblings, or other criteria.

The buddy system is usually helpful when moving from one part of the grounds to another. Children pair up and hold hands, so that each is “responsible” for the other. Point out interesting things along the way or ask children questions such as, “Who can see something blue?” “Who can see something shaped like a circle?” You may look for circles or whatever you have selected for the whole period of the walk, or switch periodically to looking for something else. Some teachers

will say, “Get in line with a buddy, and give the buddy a ‘warm fuzzy’ (compliment).” This not only gets children in line, but is also an esteem-building activity.

You may suggest that children pretend to be elephants, rhinos or other slow-moving animals, or hop for a time like bunnies, depending on how quiet they need to be and how much energy you want to use up. You might march to a new location while singing a song or reciting a Bible passage or repeating a memory verse over and over.

### **REGAINING OR REFOCUSING ATTENTION**

If attention seems to be dragging, a spontaneous “transition” may be helpful. Take time to sing a song with motions such as “Head and Shoulders, Knees and Toes” or “Deep and Wide,” or do a brief activity, such as shaking hands with four people while singing a song. Have everyone stand up and imitate a favorite animal for 15 seconds and then sit down. Another possibility is to clap a pattern and have the children clap it back. Some teachers find that they can get attention and quiet by dimming the lights.

It is sometimes fun to use sound signals. For instance you may say to the class, “Today, when I clap once (or ring the bell, beat the drum, clang the cymbals) it means ‘Stand up!’ When I clap twice, it means ‘Sit down!’” This could be a daily routine, but give it variety by clapping one day, using a drum the next and so on.

### **CHANGING THE PACE AND NOISE LEVEL**

Transitions from noisy, active parts of the session to quieter parts may often be better accomplished by use of music or games. Begin with something active, then progress to quieter songs or games to change the mood.

When children come in from playing on the playground, they may be excited and noisy. A transition activity that helps them “wind down” is helpful. They may be given a snack or a short time for just chatting, or you might sing a song.

The best way to lower the level of noise in a room may be for the teachers or leaders to lower *their* voices. That way the children have to be quiet in order to hear what they are saying. Some leaders find it helps to blink the lights or even to turn the lights off for a few minutes (assuming that does not make the room really dark) when the noise level begins to exceed acceptable limits. Children are told that if the lights are flicked or dimmed, that is a sign to slow down and become quieter.

### **ENDING THE DAY**

“Smooth, quick transitions 'do not just happen' . . .”  
-Bob F. Steere

It is helpful to give children an indication that your time together is almost over, so they can prepare to leave. A departure routine may be helpful (such as picking up their bags with today’s crafts and papers). Where a sign-out procedure is used, children need to understand it clearly. Unless parents all arrive to pick up children at the same time, it may be helpful to have small group or individual activities at the end of the session, so parents do not

disrupt the conclusion of a large group session by their arrival.

When children are picked up by car, an established routine and traffic pattern will help

ensure that children will not be walking in front of cars.

### **QUESTIONS TO PONDER**

- Do you want chairs moved quietly when children leave the table?
- What songs and games will help children move from activity and noise toward a more quiet and contemplative mood?
- When is it appropriate for children to move quietly and slowly, and when is a “bunny hop” appropriate?

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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