

## Helping Children With Transitions

*by Peggy Veltman*

What do young children in child care and other programs spend most of their time doing during waking hours? It may surprise you to know that most of their time is spent moving from one activity to another. In fact, the expenditure of time spent moving from one activity to another is pretty typical whether your child is in care or not.

Moving or transitioning from one activity to another begins when your child wakes up in the morning. Getting out of bed, bathing, brushing teeth, dressing, eating breakfast, cleaning up, getting into the car or bicycle trailer and arriving at your next destination involves a series of actions during which children are actually leaving one activity and taking up another. Since we are asking children to change what they're doing frequently and often at our whim, it's worth thinking about how well we're doing this.

How well transitions go will depend upon many things, including your child's current ability to cope with change and at what rate; your child's communication skills; how much time you have to accomplish what needs to be done; how much sleep you had the night before; how much sleep your child had the night before; whether either of you are feeling unwell or uncomfortable; how much help you have getting to where you need to go; concerns about family, friends or an ailing pet; whether something unforeseen has happened so far; how you're doing at work or school; heavy traffic and aggressive drivers; weather conditions—you get the picture.

A misstep in how you handle moving your child from one activity to another, even when it's seemingly become routine, has the potential of coloring his or her day. For instance, tights instead of socks, barrettes instead of ponytails, shoes instead of sandals can, on some days, be more than your child can handle. When you think about it, it's really not so different for adults. Nothing can impede a transition like discovering that you've misplaced your keys when you're leaving home, or finding you have a dead battery.

It's not realistic to be well rested, healthy and positive all of the time. It's difficult to be at your best and feel your best consistently, no matter how hard you try. Some of these things just aren't under your control. Your focus must be on what you can control. Transitions are changes and you are the change agent for your child, meaning, your role is pivotal to the success of the transition. As the change agent, there are things you can do to increase the chances you'll be able to move your child from one activity to another without incident. The following have worked for me:

- Try to give yourself plenty of time just in case . . .
- Use of a "transition toy" your child can hold before, during and/or after the move.
- Describe what's going to happen next and what he or she can look forward to.
- Compliment your child on something he or she is doing well.
- Remind your older child what will happen later in the day.

- Ask your child care teacher what works at child care.
- Sing a favorite song together.
- Make a game out of the move, and let your child be the leader.
- Ask other parents what works for them.

If one strategy doesn't work, give it more time. If you're still having problems, make modifications or try something else. Keep at it and you'll find something that is good for both of you. Good luck.

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