

What is a Transition Cue?

A transition cue is an object that is given to a student to prompt him to independently go to a designated area and/or to check his schedule when transitioning from activity to activity.

Why use a transition cue?

Most teachers use verbal cues to direct their students to transition between activities. Verbal cues are often not enough since they are fleeting; visual cues are lasting. Handing a student a transition cue piece allows him to have a tangible reminder of the fact that he must transition to another activity and often motivates him to complete the steps necessary to move on.

What can be used as a transition cue?

- Be creative!
- Transition cues should be small and sturdy. Examples include:
- Poker chips
- Laminated cards with a photograph of the student's schedule
- Laminated cards with picture icons of a check mark
- A card with a word or picture indicating the area where the student is expected to go
- Small, shaped erasers
- A real object that indicated where the student is to be going, such as a small book
- Popsicle sticks

Other Tips on Using a Transition Cue

- Be sure to have extra transition cues available and stored in a designated place.
- Next to the schedule and/or locations in the classroom where the student is expected to go, have a designated place where the student should place the transition cue.

Examples include:

- Velcro on the table, wall, or desk to affix the transition cue
- Cups
- Envelopes
- Small boxes with slots cut in the top

Transition Activities for the Classroom

Music

- Playing music gives an audible cue that it's time to move from one activity to the next. If you're concerned with getting through the transition as quickly as possible, choose upbeat music with a fast pace. This encourages students to move through their transition responsibilities faster to match the pace. Teach children that as soon as they hear the music they begin the transition routine. For example, at the end of the day this might include cleaning off their desks, picking up the floor around them and gathering their homework folders. Tell them they need to have all of the transition tasks done by the time the music stops. This encourages them to keep moving.

Line Up Shapes/Colors

- Lining up to move to another room sometimes leads to arguments and racing to get into a certain position. Calling certain groups to line up individually reduces the number of kids who are getting in line at the same time. It also controls which students will stand together. Make custom name tags using die-cut shapes as the base. Choose four or five shapes for name tags, such as flowers, fish, trees, triangles and houses. Make the shapes in different colors. For example, you might have a red, blue, green, yellow and orange flower. Make sure none of the name tags are exactly the same, with either the shape or color different from all of the others. To line up, call out either a shape or a color. If you call out red, any child with a red name tag may line up regardless of shape. When calling out a shape, the color of the name tags doesn't matter. This gives two options for lining up students.

Guided Imagery

- Some transitions call for students to have a calm demeanor. Guided imagery works in situations where you're moving from an active, energetic activity such as gym class to a quiet activity such as reading class. Students will close their eyes as you give them verbal cues. Shutting off the light during the activity helps kids calm down even more. They will visualize the situation you describe. For example, you might describe a beach scene with white sand and gently rolling waves. Give specific details about what they will experience. Describe a gentle wind blowing across their faces and blowing their hair, a salty spray of water as a wave hits a rock or the grainy feeling of the sand under their feet. The activity will calm the students and help them expand their imaginations.

Clapping Rhythms

- Clapping rhythms get all students together so they can move on to the next activity. Start clapping a rhythm over and over. As the kids hear the rhythm they join in. A few students will join at first and gradually the entire class will catch on and join the rhythm. You can also change the rhythm partway through to see which students are really paying attention. This makes the kids focus more closely on the transition activity. Get the kids in line or to a different area of the room for the next activity while still clapping the rhythm. Gradually slow down the rhythm and stop when you're ready to start the next activity.

Hodgepodge of Transitions

Beat the Timer

- Tell them that you are going to play Beat the Timer. Set the timer for a certain number of minutes and tell them they need to put things back where they belong (line up quietly, put things away) before the timer rings. Fun and quick transition.

Verbal Notices

- Explain to them in a brief way that it will be time to end the current activity soon to get ready for something else. Then you can use any of the other transition ideas after this statement to help ease the change.

Magic Mist

- When it is time to end one activity and settle down for circle time or rest time, spray the room with "Magical Are You Listening Mist". Fill a spray bottle with water and add a tiny drop of cinnamon flavoring in it. Spray up toward the ceiling so that the mist falls gently on the children. Tell them when the magic mist falls they need to be listening and getting ready for another activity.

Exercise

- If you are transitioning from one quiet activity to another, get your students up and out of their seats to wake them up and give yourself time to gather your materials. If space permits, ask students to do 10 jumping jacks, touch their toes or perform some other simple whole-body movement. Monitor the situation to avoid misbehavior.

Focus Techniques

- If students are moving from a loud activity such as recess to a quiet activity such as silent reading, help them focus during your transitional period. Scholastic recommends asking students to take a few deep breaths and focus on their breathing before entering into a new activity. You might also ask students to place their heads on their desks and close their eyes for a few moments while they visualize a particular scene to help them focus and regain control.

Compete as a Group

- Challenge students to complete a task, such as lining up, putting their book bags away or taking their seats, within a certain period of time. Set goals for students and chart their progress. Reward them when they reach their goal if they have improved their time.

Assign a Cue to Specific Transitions

- Alternatively, you might use different cues to gain different responses. For example, you might use the cue of clapping your hands to let students know that it's time to line up to leave the classroom, while turning off the lights lets students know that it's time to return to their seats after a group activity. Try different methods to see what works best with your students.

Harmony Harmonica

Anyone exposed to trauma or high stress—which is a lot of adults and children in many schools—overreact to angry faces and voices. In schools, adults quite often display angry faces and/or voices when they tell students to make transitions, such as putting something down, listening to an instruction, or beginning a new task. These transitions occur easily 50 times a day in a school or even in one single classroom.

If students do not look at the adult's mouth when hearing an instruction, they are likely to follow the instruction only about 20% of the time—mostly because the brain will not 'hear' the instruction, even though the teacher said it. Thus, teachers begin to raise their voices. This then adds to any fear, freezing, or aggression in some students—although the adults may sense that the child finally heard them because they raised their voices.

HOW TO:

Using a harmonica for an audio cue and raising your hand with a peace sign or feather, praising youth for looking at you, and then giving the instruction will reduce transition time dramatically. Typically, teachers report that transitions take 5 to 10 seconds instead of 2 to 5 minutes. This saves nearly two to four weeks of time for teaching and learning, and also reduces upset. This evidence-based kernel comes from the practical literature of teaching and some applied research literature, with an understanding of the cognitive processes of children and adults affected by trauma.

The strategy is simple: each time you must interrupt students to give a new instruction, use a harmonica along with a hand signal. Keep smiling and praise those who stop and look at you quickly. Avoid displaying hard looks or nasty faces. Here is the recipe for this evidence-based kernel:

- Buy a harmonica. They are not expensive (about \$6.00). Do not use the cheap plastic ones, as they make a terrible sound and break easily.
- Put a lanyard on it for ease of use.
- Practice using it to discover the sound that is pleasant to you.
- Teach students how to respond to the sound and to your visual cue (peace sign or feather).
- Use this kernel every hour for most transitions.
- Remember to give instructions ONLY after students are looking at your mouth and don't turn your back unless you want students NOT to follow through.
- Praise quick compliance and follow through.

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