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Ready... Set... Go! Transition Strategies for Caregivers

By Dr. Charles Sophy

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A Thoughtful Plan Can Diffuse the Power Struggle

Does the thought of asking your child to move on to their next activity unnerve you?

Picture this: Your child comes home from school and heads straight for the playroom, excited to spend some time with their new Star Wars action figures or Barbie Doll. They play for an hour; you can hear their squeals of delight from the kitchen as you're preparing dinner. And then, the moment you dread... it's time to call your child to dinner. The battle begins.

You call once, no reply. You call again only to be greeted with "In a minute, Mom!" and then "Just a sec" or worse, an exasperated "Okay - I'm coming!" and no hungry child appearing at the table. As the food grows cold, your internal temperature rises until you swear you could reheat the soup just by sticking your finger in it - and still no hungry child at the table.

In childcare, transition times are when you are trying to help children finish an activity or daily routine and move on to another one. During free play, children will often be very engaged in their chosen activity and they will find it difficult to abruptly stop what they are doing. The same holds true for any favorite activity - playing the piano, talking on the phone with friends or even listening to the new Green Day CD.

Transitioning from one activity to another is often a difficult time in child care settings. But there's no reason to throw in the towel and admit defeat. Transitions can be transformed into positive experiences by a solid upfront plan. Preparation is your best friend in engaging your child in transition activities. Transitional activities can be positive and exciting ways of moving children from one

activity to another. They can make finishing one activity and moving on to another activity a learning experience and an adventure.

Let's look at our free play example and incorporate a simple technique to smooth your child's transition from playtime to dinner time. You may find it helpful to give them a warning that playtime will soon be over. Instead of calling out "five more minutes," ensure your child has heard you by going directly to them and saying "You have time for one more checkers game. Dinner is in five minutes." The warning serves two purposes:

1. It clearly sets a plan for your child to follow (only one more game) and
2. It shifts your child's focus from the current activity to the new one.

Some children may take longer to stop one activity and move on to the next. Even with fair warning, many children will be reluctant to stop playing in favor of doing homework, having dinner, or taking a bath. If your child is unable to switch gears quickly, it is helpful to give this type of child ten-minute, five-minute and one-minute warnings before a change. This allows them to gradually prepare for the shift.

Transition times and activities differ from child to child and even activity to activity. You may find that your child transitions quickly from playtime to a pizza dinner but drags their feet when transitioning from t.v. time to bed time. Knowledge from your child's past transitions and understanding of your child and their feelings is the foundation on which to build your transition strategy. Some of the following may raise your insights towards transition:

1. How is my child behaving/feeling?

Anxiety: For some children, change (even simple change) is often difficult. Ease the child's anxiety, and resistance to change diminishes significantly.

Anger: Leaving an enjoyable activity for a less enjoyable activity often results in anger in the child. Setting a time to resume the enjoyable activity or devising creative transition activities (a song or role playing) can help diffuse the child's tension.

Control: When parents understand the temperament of their children, it's easier to control the transition process. Transition activities for a 2 year old differ greatly from those of a 12 year old. Keep your child's temperament and age in mind when planning transition strategies. 2. How are these behaviors/feelings addressed?

Identification: Mindful observation of your child's positive and negative transitions can yield important clues to help smooth future transitions.

Minimize impacts: Timely and calming approaches to transitions create a sense of routine and security for your child.

Model healthy patterns of transition: Children emulate the people they love. Sometimes teaching your child healthy transition behaviors is as simple as modeling them yourself. 3. How do you sustain

good behaviors?

Awareness: Build upon your child's strengths and successful transitions. Support: Recognize your child's weaknesses and alter your strategy in dealing with them.

Remember: Always try to think about your plan to transition before you begin the dialogue'.

Dr. Charles Sophy currently serves as Medical Director for the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), which is responsible for the health, safety and welfare of nearly 40,000 foster children. He also has a private psychiatry practice in Beverly Hills, California. Dr. Sophy has lectured extensively and is an Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California Los Angeles Neuro–Psychiatric Institute. His lectures and teachings are consistently ranked as among the best by those in attendance.

Dr. Charles Sophy, author of the "Keep `Em Off My Couch" blog, provides real simple answers for solving life's biggest problems. He specializes in improving the mental health of children. To contact Dr. Sophy, visit his blog at

<http://drsophy.com>

Why Schedule a Transition Phase?

By Matt Russ

Why Schedule a Transition Phase? by Matt Russ

The transition phase may be referred to as "off season" training but is not a time to take "off." Actually, there is no "off" season. The transition phase is the time of year to let your body fully recover, both mentally and physically, while maintaining a level of fitness. It is the time to let those nagging little injuries heal up. The transition phase can last 4–6 weeks and occurs directly after the final peak of the season.

I usually give my athletes a week of rest or very limited training following peak, and then start the transition phase. I give them the most flexibility and autonomy during this period. I tell the athlete to take extra rest days if needed and we schedule a few weeks with consecutive days off. Cross training and other activities are encouraged, especially for runners. I like to give the joints and connective tissue a break from the impact of running and will schedule runs as little as 2x per week. I do not encourage racing during the transition phase other than at a base or non–competitive level. I discouraged a race that requires preparation or volume increase.

A typical transition week will have the athlete working out 4–5 days per week with rest days in between. There is no progression. Volume can be greatly reduced as long as there are brief bouts of intensity. I will cut interval volume way down but never eliminate higher intensities completely to maintain aerobic

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capacity. I do encourage one longer work out per week at a base level to maintain endurance. Some light strength training can occur, mainly to acclimate the body for resistance training. Reps are high, weight low, and the number of sets small. Core work is emphasized.

Mentally it may be hard for you to transition for the first time following peak. If you are used to higher volume and high intensity and you may feel they are going to loose too much fitness. I have found that athletes who transition a few seasons actually look forward to it and may train even harder leading up to transition. It is the light at the end of the tunnel. I like my athletes coming out of transition feeling a bit under trained and ready for the increased volume in base.

Conversely: taking time off completely means spending a majority of your base season making up for lost ground. Each season should build on the last. If you take 8 weeks off you may find your race times are similar to last years (or worse).

The transition phase is an important part of an annual training plan and should not be overlooked. Be sure you end your season with a transition before you begin the next.

Matt Russ has coached and trained athletes around the country and internationally. He currently holds licenses by USAT, USATF, and is an Expert level USAC coach. Matt coaches athletes for CTS, is an Ultrafit Associate, and owner of www.thesportfactory.com



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